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Volume One

NAXALBARI AND AFTER

a frontier anthology

Edited by
Samar Sen
Debabrata Panda
Ashish Lahiri

Kathashilpa
CALCUTTA 700 073

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FOREWORD

Looking back, one gets mixed feelings today about this water-shed between the act that took place and the unwritten acts to follow.

Naxalbari exploded many a myth and restored faith in the courage and character of the revolutionary Left in India. It seemed that the ever-yawning gap between precept and practice since Telengana would be bridged. Indeed, the upheaval was such that nothing remained the same after Naxalbari. People had to readjust their position vis-a-vis every aspect of the system : political, administrative, military, cultural.

Frontier reflected the new trend. Many minds found expression in it—critical, brilliant, flamboyant, impetuous, analytical, crude, romantic, intrepid minds. Though not a participant, *Frontier* became associated with the movement.

But what did Naxalbari achieve in practical terms ?—the cynic might ask. And it is a difficult question to answer. Admittedly, the Naxalites raised more problems than they solved. But the very problems they raised and tried to solve in a hurry had never been raised with such force of sincerity before or after Telengana. That is their achievement.

While choosing the material—voluminous in its mass—our constant endeavour has been to bring to life, in as objective a manner as possible, the *totality* of the impact of the movement. The noble, though often irrational passion, the courage—if suicidal, the total self-denial, the enormity of the terror let loose against them, the in-fighting, the anger—often misdirected ; all these varied and conflicting data appear side by side, so that the reader can judge today what he might have missed in the immediacy of those red-hot days.

The Naxalite movement has been defeated, but not routed. A process of rethinking is on. And in that process many of the leaders have changed their views radically. Things, they say, turn into their opposites. The views as they appear in these two volumes are, therefore, not necessarily the same as those adhered to at present by the same leaders.

A few words about the order in which the matter has been arranged. While a general chronological order has been maintained throughout, in some cases this has been broken deliberately in order to give the reader a more complete comprehension of the particular subject or incident. Thus, for example, the four pieces on Tellichery-Pulpalli have been printed consecutively, although they embrace a period of more than a year. To avoid repetitions, the original articles have in some cases been edited, without, of course, damaging the main contents or spirit.

The date appearing at the end of each article or letter denotes the date of publication of that particular issue of *Frontier*.

Vol. I contains only reports and comments. The debates and the documents, including some not published in *Frontier*, will come out in Vol. II.

Calcutta
June 16, 1978

Samar Sen

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REPORTS AND COMMENTS

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Andhra Pradesh

CLASS WAR

A CORRESPONDENT

Andhra is much in the news all over the country. Not for its achievements in foodgrains production or for its involvement in river waters dispute but for the harijan killing spree of the landlords during the past two months.

It all started in October last when the landlords in Gummalaxmipuram in the Parvatipuram area of Srikakulam district shot dead two tribals for having dared to join a movement asking for implementation of the 1917 regulation enacted by the British rulers, prohibiting alienation of tribal lands by plainsmen. It was not the communists who took law and order into their own hands, but the landlords. But strangely enough, the Government sent five platoons of special police to put down the tribals who were victims of landlord brutality.

This was indeed a signal for the landlord class in the whole State to go on a attack-and-kill spree. No price need be paid for killing a poor man, provided the killer is a landlord and a supporter of the Government.

The most prominent incident that took place between the attack on tribals and the harijan boy incident in February was the thirty-six-hour-long raid on Takulapalli village in Khammam district by the followers of a Minister from that district. The goondas went in lorries to the hamlet of Lambadis (tribals), surrounded the village, looted every house and carried the booty in lorries after setting fire to the house, raping at least half-a-dozen women and beating up literally everyone, including a sixty-year-old man. Some people were reluctantly arrested, and then one doesn't know what happened to them.

The facts of the Kanchakacherla incident in which a harijan boy was tied to a pole and an attempt made to burn him alive by a group of people led by a fifty-year-old woman (owning 50 acres of virginia tobacco land) are too well-known to be repeated here. The only significant aspect of this incident is that the State Government's police were sleeping over the incident until the issue was raised in Parliament and then only the culprits were arrested.

As Parliament was discussing this matter, another group of landlords rounded up a group of tribals in Kammavaripalem village in the same Krishna district, confined them for two days without food and water, alleging that they had come to the village to commit theft. These tribals have been coming to the village every year for years together in that season for agricultural operations.

Within a week of this incident, an agricultural labourer was hacked and speared to death in Inapur village in the same district. This was followed by the murder of an agricultural labourer in a village in Warangal district, another in Khammam district and yet another in Manikonda village in Krishna district again.

Without exception, in all these cases, it was the landlord that killed a poor man.

It is a clear case of class war declared by the landed gentry on the landless.

It is to cover up this that a harijan twist is being given and attempts are being made to sidetrack the attention of the public from the real cause. Simultaneous attempts are being made to split the trade union movement on scheduled caste non-scheduled caste basis.

The Left Communist leader, Mr Nagi Reddy, said on the floor of the Assembly that his party was not fighting shy of owning up its responsibility for the struggle of the tribal people in Srikakulam district. He told the Government that his party could not be expected to sit tight when the Government itself, by its policies, was unfolding a situation for his

party to jump into the fray and lead the people against injustice.

May 4, 1968

Kerala

TELLICHERY-PULPALLI

RAMJI

A ludicrous incident that would not take in any normally intelligent person, has been stagemanaged here, and there has been a rash of screaming headlines in leading dailies that the Marxist extremists have rung the curtain up on their policy of an armed revolution.

This frame-up is very much similar to the notorious Reichstag fire incident stagemanaged by Hitler to crush the communists.

A police station, it is said, was attacked by an armed gang numbering three hundred at about 3 a.m. on November 22. They carried spears, acid bulbs, country-made bombs and grenades, pepper powder and, for good measure, Maoist literature and a bundle of letters addressed to persons in China ! They attacked under the red banner as well as the banner of the Muslim League and the Congress ! However, the blood-thirsty gang with their secret weapons, such as letters to Peking etc., took fright when the sentry raised a hue and cry and without firing any damaging shot everyone of them took to his heels and very thoughtfully left behind all the weapons, flags, literature and letters, to furnish proof for the benefit of the police perhaps.

Why this determined band chose a well-populated coastal town instead of a town in the hilly or forest fastnesses of Kerala or why after having decided to attack, they beat a hasty retreat at the first outcry from the sentry are points that are irrelevant in the eyes of the authorities, the police and of

course the respectable Press. This incident has been flashed all over India and another 'Naxalbari' has been rigged up in Kerala : this time the name is Tellichery.

Certain other points help to explode this absurd frame-up. The State conference of the Communist Revolutionaries of Kerala, the name of the extremist breakaway Marxists, is to take place tomorrow at Thodupuzha, in central Travancore. That the members of this party would have been so foolish as to time their raid in such a manner, and cause a serious threat to their first conference, is a factor that defies all explanation. Some people are saying that this has been rigged up by the administration and, maybe, by certain elements in the ruling Marxist party to vilify the new-born organisation and to bring on its head deterrent action by the Government.

Anyway, in Kerala the report of this incident has raised a big laugh. People ask why the raiders left behind all the weapons and letters even when they took fright at the sentry's alarm. This is the most unconvincing side of the story. And also the fact that the police were not able to capture on the spot even one of the assailants who became lily-livered cowards the moment the battle was joined.

At noon on that day Mr. Ariyakandi, an extremist leader, was arrested at Tellichery. He is the convener of the State conference and he was standing in broad daylight at a busy bus stand at a stone's throw from the police station, to take a bus to the venue of the Party meeting at Thodupuzha. He was arrested on suspicion. When the police van came and he was asked to step in, he asked them loudly, "Didn't you rig up the entire show ?" The policemen looked self-conscious and the crowd around had a hearty laugh.

To this extent the plot has succeeded. The plotters have been able to immobilise a key leader of the new party on the eve of its first and most important State conference.

November 30, 1968

Kerala

AFTER PULPALLI : THE FRAME-UP

RAMJI

The Tellichery and Pulpalli incidents have been twisted by all sections, progressives and reactionaries alike, to a fantastic extent. Strangely enough, under a United Front Government, the police took along with them correspondents of the two leading language papers which are anti-communist, and every detail of police tracking, capture etc. were flashed in these papers and reports resembled front-line despatches. More strange is the fact that the police gave these correspondents access to the case diaries and obligingly dressed and undressed and fancy-dressed Ajitha, especially, for photographs. The publicity ballyhoo was unprecedented in the local Press and even Mr. A. K. Gopalan, M. P., said he was mystified over these irregular proceedings by the police.

The latest disclosure has come as a bombshell. The Marxist party has evidently used the *Blitz* staff correspondent in Kerala to plant a fabricated story in *Blitz* dated December 21.

In this front-pager, the staff correspondent claims that he was the only one who had the opportunity to meet Ajitha in jail and obtain an exclusive "confession" from her. The confession, so called, is an abject statement by Ajitha in which she has condemned herself and the movement and expressed regret for it.

It has now come out that the story is a fabrication. Ajitha has preferred an appeal to the Kerala High Court, praying that action may be taken against the paper and its staffs for contempt of court. She states that she "vehemently denies having given any interview to the *Blitz* correspondent or any other correspondent" and adds that this has been wilfully published to prejudice her case. She is also planning to file a case

with the District Magistrate, Calicut, for defamation against the paper and its staffs.

Mr Mayan Kutty, Ajitha's advocate, has stated that he himself made enquiries at the jail and learnt to his full belief that Ajitha had not been permitted to grant any such interview and that such interviews with the Press are not permissible under prison rules.

These being the facts, it is fairly certain that the story was planted with ulterior motives to discredit the extremists who were causing such a headache to the Marxists.

The Minister gave out a statement refuting the stories that Ajitha and others had been manhandled by the police. Ajitha's advocate, Mr Mayan Kutty, has stated categorically that Ajitha, Mandakini and others were cruelly beaten up by the police and that one Sankaran Master belonging to the group is now in hospital swathed in plaster with most of his ribs and other bones broken.

From the letters sent by Kunnikal Narayanan, K. P. Narayanan, Ajitha and Mandakini to the advocate, which were personally verified by me, it is evident that they are bitterly against the Right and Left CPI and also against the breakaway group led by K. P. R. Gopalan and others. They are confident that sooner or later the movement set afoot by them would prevail. And they have spurned the efforts of the Defence Council set up by the Right CPI. The spirit in all the letters is at direct variance with the alleged "confession."

It is interesting to note that they at first refused the offer of help from their present advocate, Mayan Kutty, thinking that he belonged to the Defence Council. Later when they knew he was acting on his own as a professional man, they accepted him. Mr Kunnikal Narayanan has issued a statement through his lawyer condemning the efforts of the Right Communists and the K. P. R.-Naxalites and the inhuman attitude of the Marxists towards them. He has affirmed his confidence in their movement and has appealed to the public for help to fight their case.

An interesting sidelight is the role of the Right CPI. When they set up the Defence Council at Calicut in December, it was resolved to request the Government to treat the culprits as political prisoners. But it is interesting that the party has not done anything about it.

January 18, 1969

Letter

CHARGES WITHDRAWN ?

Press and radio reports recently put out that the charges framed against the majority of the accused in the Tellichery-Pulpalli Station raid cases are being withdrawn by the Namboodiripad Ministry. The Press release says in the context : 'It is not the accredited policy of this Government to suppress the different political expressions of the people of this State'. Since when did this become the 'accredited' policy of this Government ? Was this their policy during November-December 1968 and the months following ? If so, why was it that they let loose terror in the countryside, why was there reckless manhunting and even jail repression ? Why did they allocate such a fabulous sum in this year's police budget, recruit police forces on such an unprecedented scale, give special powers to police officers and men of all grades and instal numerous sets of intricate wireless apparatus in police stations throughout the State ? If all these are not meant for suppressing the legitimate political expression of the people, what else are they meant for ?

The people of Kerala have chosen a new path to solve the innumerable problems that crush life out of them inch by inch. This is the path opened in 1967 by the revolutionary peasants of Naxalbari and the proletarian revolutionaries of Darjeeling district—the path of peasants' armed struggle.

To counter this totally unexpected development the reactionaries are entering the arena with many a 'new' tactic. With armed peasant struggles raging all the way from Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh to the length and breadth of the subcontinent, we see Indira Gandhi donning in haste the socialist garb with Bank nationalisation. We see the diehards in the Congress and other extreme decadent parties, under the leadership of Patil and company of the 'Syndicate', waving the tattered flag of military dictatorship. We also see the leadership of the 'Marxist' party masking their reactionary revisionist features with 'revolutionary' slogans. It matters little to the Indian revolutionaries. The Indian peasants and the proletarian revolutionaries will march forward along the path opened by Naxalbari, the path of armed struggle.

K. AJITHA

August 2, 1969 Calicut, Kerala

Letter

TELLICHERY-PULPALLI

In the early hours of November 22, 1968 over 300 workers, peasants and students armed with all sorts of hand-made weapons made an attempt to raid the main police station at Tellichery in North Malabar. Their plan went awry. Discarding everything in their possession they took to their heels and spread themselves all over the State and outside in an attempt to evade the police. Thus the lid was laid on a 'ludicrous' incident (as *Frontier*'s Ramji described it) but which, as few imagined at that time, was nonetheless only a prelude to what was to take place just 48 hours later in the deep, desolate jungles of the Wynaad range of hills.

In the early hours of November 24, scores of peasant revolutionaries armed with country-made guns, hand-made bombs

and other weapons raided the police wireless station at Pulpalli, on top of the Wynaad ranges and destroyed it. In the melee that followed, a police wireless operator was killed, a sub-inspector and several constables were wounded. The jubilant rebels then proceeded to attack the local landlords and rouse the local peasantry. Having accomplished their plans they went their way swiftly to the deep Tirunelli forests, a few miles away, to await their comrades-in-arms from Tellichery to join forces with them and then to spread the flames of armed revolt all over Wynaad, as a beginning to the end of the age-old reactionary rule of the Congress and revisionist parties who were only stooges of foreign imperialists. Wynaad, it must be remembered, was the homeland of traditionally martial tribesmen like Kurichians and others who today are made to live like beasts of prey. Two-thirds of the land here belong, even now, to British imperialist plantation owners.

Little did the comrades of Pulpalli suspect at that time that they had already been betrayed at Tellichery. Days and days of waiting in this desolate jungle brought them no solace. Their numbers were depleted. And in an accident which set off their stock of explosives, they lost for ever one of their stalwarts, a poor peasant revolutionary, Kisan Thomman. Fully armed rice-soldiers of the EMS Government were already sweeping the jungles and ravines of Wynaad with the aid of helicopters and police dogs. Having lost all hope of coming across any of the comrades they were expecting, and in desperation, this band of young revolutionaries broke up to meet again somewhere else. But in the execution of this plan, almost all of them were outwitted by the police and got arrested.

What followed is known to everybody—the reign of terror, molestation, lock-up, torture and repression let loose on the people and the revolutionaries.

What made these young workers and peasants and young intellectuals resort to armed action ? The problems they faced under a century-old imperialist and feudal oppressive rule, of the total pauperisation of the peasantry and the mounting

destitution of the workers in the beedi, handloom and other industries were beyond solution by 'peaceful' parliamentary methods. Slowly, yet surely, they began to realise that unless political power is in their hands directly, no redress could be found. And experience has taught them that whomsoever they voted to power always turned their back the minute they got on the saddle and hit them the same way as did the hated Congress administration and their imperialist masters in the past. The only way open for them was to capture political power directly and this, they found, could only be done by sheer armed force.

There was a time when such a way of thinking was considered downright madness. But times have changed—indeed changed beyond recognition. In the East, a new Red Sun has not only risen but is steadily shedding its brilliance all over the world. It is fast dispelling the age-old darkness from the continents of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The exploits of the brave Vietnamese peasants have once for all shattered the myth that the imperialists are almighty. They were proved to be paper tigers. On top of all this came the Cultural Revolution in China, which has irrevocably and inevitably heralded a new era in human society. It was in these conditions that the first spring thunder broke out in India, in Naxalbari, heralding the new course that the Indian people were to take for their liberation.

They knew the Congress always spoke lies. They had discarded it long ago. Discarded also were all other reactionary and social-democratic parties including the Dange clique of modern revisionism. There remained only the revisionists of EMS-A.K. Gopalan brand. Naxalbari spelled their doom too. But Malabar has been for decades the hot-bed of the intrigues of these revisionist chieftains. It was not an easy thing for our workers and peasants to shake off their influence. Yet they did, even though a wee bit, in North Malabar and in the deep jungles of Wynaad in 1968.

Tellichery-Pulpalli failed in its objective, for the time

being. But did it gain something precious ? Yes, it did. It has spread a new message, the message of Naxalbari in terms of flesh and blood, in terms of concrete action. It has also made its indelible contribution to the birth of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).

KUNNIKAL NARAYANAN

December 6, 1969 Calicut, Kerala

Comment

HUNTING WITH THE HOUNDS

What happened in the College Street area last week is ominous. The background to the story, as it could be pieced together from newspaper reports : the Calcutta University Students Union, whose legitimacy is in dispute, had taken out Rs. 6,000 from the Union funds to spend on some tamasha connected with the freshers ; the Naxalites, their demand for a ban on the Union and refund of the money having failed, had gheraoed the Vice-Chancellor for 16 hours on March 5. He was rescued by teachers and outsiders after a scuffle in which, students said, they were manhandled. The Vice-Chancellor (the same V. C. was gheraoed by students when McNamara came to town) declared that though the students were getting out of hand, he had no intention to call in the police ; but the public, the law-abiding public, should not stand by but do something to check the trouble-mongers—a policy which had been proclaimed earlier at the Maidan rally of March 9 by the Home Minister. The Vice-Chancellor spoke in the voice of Mr Panampali Govinda Menon, the Union Law Minister who is in the habit of urging fellow Keralans to defend themselves tooth and nail against the communist rowdies.

In view of this provocative call, what followed on March 13 should have been foreseen. But the Naxalites do not yet

know or care to know when to take one step back. They wanted the Vice-Chancellor and the teachers to apologise for their "rough behaviour" when he was being rescued on the day of the first gherao. It is reported that the teachers were prepared, on March 13, during the second gherao, to express regret for the incident and that the Naxalites at first were prepared to accept the regret. But then they insisted that the Vice-Chancellor must condemn the withdrawal of Rs. 6,000 by CUSU forthwith and ban the Union. Which the V. C. said he would not or could not do—he had asked the representatives of the different unions to meet him on March 14 to thrash out the issues. As the rebels wanted an immediate ban, the gherao continued. The first attempt to break it by other students failed. Then one saw the spectacle of numerous UF volunteers, many of them wearing red scarves and brandishing sticks, and students marching to Darbhanga Building in the evening to rescue the revered Vice-Chancellor. The outnumbered Naxalites tried to leave after a brief skirmish but their escape route to the "notorious" Hindu Hostel was barred ; they took another direction. During the retreat any number of crackers—or bombs—were used by both sides ; a non-student belonging to the youth wing of the CPI(M) was killed. On Friday 14, at the condolence meeting, nine UF Ministers declaring a crusade against the Naxalites, said that the public must "isolate and totally crush" them. For this even rifles might be issued, said one Minister.

The witch-hunt was almost instantaneous. Groups of young men with knives, sticks, and crackers, moved about, beating up Naxalites. They attacked the Hindu Hostel, a stronghold of the Naxalites, seven times, broke into the Coffee House, a co-operative undertaking, and ransacked everything. Even the bearers were not spared. A raid on Presidency College was attempted. The office of a Naxalite fortnightly was attacked. This seems the beginning of an intermittent, disgraceful campaign and it is sickening beyond words that UF Ministers should have encouraged it.

It is time the Naxalite students realised how far they can go. Is there any particular Maoist virtue in getting extremely isolated and damned ? Do the Naxalites not know that, with the sweeping victory of the UF, a cultural revolution has overtaken the Calcutta Press which now swears by the UF and ascribes any unpleasant thing happening under the sun to the extremists ?

And why should the Naxalites be so addicted to ghearo ? Let us not mince words—there is something vulgar about this phenomenon. Strike—and the knowledge when not to strike—is a Marxist weapon. Gherao is a petty-bourgeois gimmick. It is a sort of Gandhian satyagraha in reverse, with a vengeance. A satyagrahi was supposed to inconvenience himself to bring about a change of heart in the opponent ; a gheraoist, on the other hand, tries to inflict the maximum physical, not moral, inconvenience on the antagonist.

And what about leaders who order a witch-hunt and those who respond to the call, what about those new disciplinarians who went all out to break the gherao of the Vice-Chancellor in a rare display of devotion ? Contrary to expectations in some quarters that a sort of confrontation is imminent with those who had exploited and damned West Bengal for umpteen years, are we to have a mobilisation against the minority left ? Was it for this that the peasants, the workers and the unaffluent middle-class voted for the United Front ?

March 22, 1969

The Press

THIRD PARTY RISKS

COMMENTATOR

Most of the national newspapers have been prompt in commenting on the formation of the third Communist Party in India, announced by Mr Kanu Sanyal at the Maidan rally

of the Naxalites on May Day. Most of the papers do not concede that the Naxalites are going to emerge as a big force in the near future, but they all agree that the CPI (M) is on trial. May be because of Naxalbari, they seem to presume that the activities of the new party will be confined mainly to West Bengal and it will be more a problem to the United Front than any other State Government. For the maidan clashes they have held the new party responsible and warned that such clashes would be more frequent at the instigation of China. Some papers have sympathized with Mr. Jyoti Basu for his predicament and asked him to draw a lesson from the fact that his gesture in releasing the Naxalbari prisoners has failed to mollify the extremists. Advising him to be firm with the new party, they have reminded him of his responsibility for maintaining law and order as the Home Minister of the State. Suggestions have been made that the Naxalites should be put back to prison and the party banned. At least one paper feels that if Mr Basu does not take these steps, the Centre should intervene.

Noting that Mr Kanu Sanyal was largely silent on the programme of the new party, *The Indian Express* comments sarcastically that it will perhaps be revealed on Chairman Mao's birthday. Meanwhile, the paper says, it is possible to guess the action, programme and tactics of the new party. The revolution has been betrayed by the two communist parties and now Chairman Charubabu and Comrade Kanu Sanyal intend to set matters right and keep faith with the workers and peasants. The bourgeois institution of parliamentary democracy is not for them and the only reliable vehicle of revolutionary change is the armed strength of workers and peasants, particulary the latter in a country where the peasants form an overwhelming majority of the people. All this might sound a little mad but it would be a mistake to ignore the significance of a new Maoist party. Their capacity to recreate Naxalbari in rural pockets in various parts of the country should not be underestimated. Mr Jyoti Basu talks non-

sense when he says that his Government can curb the Naxalites' activities in West Bengal in a day if it wishes to do so. Nor does it make sense for him to say that the people themselves will deal with the Naxalites and confine them to the darkness of neglect and isolation. When the new party begins to act on its revolutionary beliefs and tries to take the law into its own hands, Mr Jyoti Basu would be well advised to do his duty. It is the job of the police to maintain law and order, and if Mr Basu entrusts it to his followers among the people at large, the Centre will be failing in its duty if it does not intervene directly to meet the challenge to law and order. The threat posed by the Naxalites cannot be treated as a feud between Mr Basu & Mr Kanu Sanyal or Mr Charu Majumdar to be settled in the the streets by rival mobs. What happened on May Day on the Calcutta Maidan should alert the Centre and indeed the country as a whole to the dangers ahead.

Writing in a similar vein *The Times of India* says : Mr Kanu Sanyal does not feel beholden to Mr Basu because he released him and his colleagues. The Naxalites regard the CPI-(M) leadership as their worst enemy because in their view it has betrayed the cause of revolution and because it challenges their claim that they are the only true revolutionaries. The battle is joined as far as the extremists are concerned. They neither seek nor will they give any quarter to their opponents. They have the blessings of China which will continue to egg them on to greater and greater violence in the name of revolution and the Thoughts of Mao Tsetung. It is for the other side, principally the CPI(M), to decide whether it is interested in survival and how it proposes to fight back. But the CPI(M) leadership will be naive if it takes the romantic view that the issue can be settled through a debate. The Naxalites do not believe in the efficacy of political debates. Power for them grows out of the barrel of a gun. The activities of the Naxalites constitute a serious threat to law and order. It is the duty of Mr Jyoti Basu, the Home Minister, to see that peace of the State is not

disrupted. If it involves sending Mr Kanu Sanyal and his associates back to jail, there should be no hesitation on his part. Like the Telengana revolt in the late forties the Naxalite phenomenon is relevant primarily in the areas ot serious peasant discontent. As such, it can be isolated and dealt with. But there is another facet of the problem, especially in West Bengal. Extremism and violence appeal to a sizeable section of the student community in Calcutta for various historical, social and economic reasons. This cannot but be a matter of serious concern for the State Government as well as the Centre. It will be absurd to suggest that these grievances must be removed, before the city becomes entitled to peace. An irresponsible section of the students cannot be allowed to hold the city to ransom every now and then. The CPI(M) leadership will have to face up to the fact that certain onerous responsibilities go with power. It is on test because its title to rule in West Bengal and elsewhere depends on its willingness to take unpleasant decisions.

The Hindustan Times says : the CPI (M) came into being as a reflex against Moscow's stranglehold on the party, only to find as it moved out of the Soviet ambience that it was getting into Peking's vice-like grip. Today, without accepting Tito's position, the CPI (M) keeps clear of both Moscow and Peking. The vacuum was bound to be filled and the former Naxalites under the leadership of Mr Charu Majumdar and Mr Kanu Sanyal have become the standard-bearers of Mao Tsetung's Thought. Mr Jyoti Basu has dismissed the party as of no account. It is true that their present support extends only to a few middle class student groups and some peasant pockets. But they may well become a formidable force in the days to come as policies of the United Front Government fail to satisfy the radical sections in Mr Basu's own party. It is significant that while Mr E.M.S. Namboodiripad in Kerala can imprison his Naxalites, Mr Basu has released his. Obviously, opposition inside the West Bengal CPI(M) is not as total as Mr Basu would have the public believe. The chief disadvantage from

which the new Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) suffers, apart from its adolescent extremism, is that it has little following outside West Bengal. The brunt of the new party's attack will have to be borne by Mr Jyoti Basu. As a vocal and strong champion of the States' right to implement law and order, he will have to take action against those whom he himself has described as consisting largely of 'anti-social' elements. If he does, he will have to face criticism from a section of his party. If he does not, he will be blackmailed into making one concession after another to the new party. Either way he is in an uncomfortable position. And this is one situation where he can not blame the Centre.

The Statesman thinks that the Naxalbari spark may help in burning some buses and trams in Calcutta or setting fire to a few village huts in Andhra and Kerala ; but plans for starting a prairie fire all over the country need not be taken seriously yet. The Naxalites have not said what their plans are—or how they propose to carry them out. No doubt the CPI (M-L) will now anxiously wait for more detailed guidance from China than has hitherto been available from Peking Radio's calls for revolutionary armed struggles all over the world. It is equally certain that Mr Mao's men will be generous with their advice. They will have no hesitation in encouraging disruptive forces in India in the name of revolution while extending full support to the military regime which has suppressed all popular movements in Pakistan. Ridiculing the Naxalites for the name they have chosen for their party, the paper says, they could not think of anything but a 'Leninist' addition to the CPI (M) —though they left nobody in any doubt about their faith in the Chinese Communist Party's contention that Mao Tsetung's Thought is Marxism-Leninism of the era. Chairman Mao may not approve of such timidity ; nor is he likely to be pleased at Mr Kanu Sanyal's reported suggestion that Mr Charu Majumdar, said to be a Naxalite theoretician, is equal to the Chairman in revolutionary wisdom.

Patriot says that the stupid brawling by a handful of

political adventurers who call themselves 'Naxalites' in Calcutta which eventually led to injuries to a number of citizens, the utterly foolish 'Maoist' posters that are reported to have appeared in certain places of Madras, the mock-heroics of the dubious 'revolutionaries' who have left Mr Namboodiripad's party in Kerala and the formation of a third communist party by Mr Kanu Sanyal on May Day are of no political significance yet. But unless they are treated as warnings by the two communist parties and the entire Indian Left, they will become a nuisance requiring serious action in the not too distant future. This is so, not because the mischief-mongers, agent provocateurs, and the desperately frustrated political misfits who are behind them have hope of gaining any kind of political stature. They have to be heeded because they will certainly be exaggerated and exploited by reactionaries and conservatives of all varieties to spread alarm in the middle class and strengthen the anti-socialist argument that any degree of true social and economic democracy is dangerous, and to defend the dirty conspiracies conducted by vested interests. What has to be grasped by all elements of the Left in the country, whether they belong at present to secular-democratic trends in the Congress, to the socialist and communist parties, or are progressive individuals unidentified with any of these parties is that the so called Naxalism and the foul politics of monopoly are two sides of the same anti-democratic, anti-socialist, anti-patriotic medal. Silently and secretly they support and sustain each other. If this is realised, it will not be difficult to understand that they can be exposed, discredited and purged only through unity and minimum national programme of patriotic-democratic socialist action by all those opposed to them. The elements that will inevitably have to constitute the core of a secular-democratic national movement for a socialist transformation of the economy are today wasting their energy and time in esoteric controversies the people cannot understand. It is their uncertainty and incapacity to see things as they are and to realise what the

people expect of them that gives opportunity to anti-patriotic adventurers of the Left and the agents of foreign and Indian monopoly on the Right to create the kind of confusion they are able to do today.

May 17, 1969

Andhra Pradesh

WHAT A CONTRAST !

NARAYANA MURTHI

The handling of the violent agitations in Telengana and Srikakulam by the Congress Government offers a violent and striking contrast.

The communists in Srikakulam made no secret of their preference to violence as the method to solve people's problems. Not because they love violence, but because non-violence never paid. But the Telengana leaders, all Congressmen, followers of the non-violent Mahatma, swore to carry on their agitation by peaceful methods but are acting through violent means only. Yet the communists are being hunted by squads of armed reserve police day in and day out, while the Congress leaders were given the utmost freedom to preach violence from public platforms and practise it in the most violent form during the last six months.

The targets of communists at Srikakulam and elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh were not policemen or Ministers or any Government property ; their targets were the hated landlords and those who sucked the blood of the tribal people. They attacked those who violated Government laws and usurped the poor innocent and ignorant tribals of their lands ; they waited for 20 years after independence for the Government to act to implement its own laws, but as the Government always defended the exploiters, the communists went to the aid of the

tribals. Strangely enough, those who stand by the law are being hunted, while those who violate the law are being sheltered.

In the so called communist-infested areas of Srikakulam and elsewhere, insecurity of life and property is felt only by those whose hands are red with the blood of the people, and the Government moved in nearly ten companies of CRP to provide protection to them. But in Hyderabad city, the State capital, there is little security of life and property for the fourteen lakh population. A man who goes out of his house is not sure of his return ; he may be waylaid, beaten, stoned or killed by the agitators. Right in broad daylight, it is the common knowledge of everyone that scores of women were subject to indignities, including undressing almost to the point of nakedness right on the roads (raping apart). Despite the presence of the police and army, all this goes on.

Such contrasts in any number of aspects can be given. The lesson is simple : violence has to be put down, but only if it is by communists and not if the perpetrators are Congressmen and their followers. Violence has to be curbed only if it is against the landlords and their like, but not if it is against the common people.

July 19, 1969

THE SRIKAKULAM STORY

NARAYANA MURTHI

Just change the date and place. It is the same story day after day and week after week. Naxalites are killed by the dozens in Andhra.

Way back in 1948-50, during the height of the Telengana struggle, it was the same story. Every day, there was news about an encounter and some guerillas were killed. But it transpired, the communists were taken out of bed, taken some-

where and shot. And the story was put out that they were killed in an encounter.

And how many police are being killed now ? They can be counted on your fingertips. Perhaps, the Naxalites are fools and so inexperienced that they offer themselves to the armed police along with guns, ammunition, grenades—every conceivable weapon is mentioned—and there is no occasion for the police to be killed. At least the Government wants us to believe all this.

To the newsmen who are hungry for news, it is readymade food. Go any day to the police and they have a story of an encounter with the Naxalites, it is the Naxalites who shoot first and the police return the fire, killing one or two. The columnists and special correspondents are all busy writing about the increasing menace, the danger to parliamentary democracy, the need to put down violence and so on.

The new Home Minister, who joined the Brahmananda Reddy Ministry after having got tired of abusing him for more than two years, is busy trying to divert the attention of the people from the Telengana agitation to the Naxalite menace, posing it as a greater danger. Within a fortnight after being sworn in, he made a trip to Srikakulam to lend weight to the story he is putting out about this great danger. Even the Governor, in his opening speech to the monsoon session of the State legislature, characterised Naxalite activities as a "more fundamental threat to the peace and tranquillity of the State".

It is hardly one taluq and that too in the forest areas of that taluq in Srikakulam district and a couple of pockets in Khammam and Warangal districts where Naxalite activities are cited. According to the Deputy Chief Minister, Rs 100 crores worth of property, mainly government property was destroyed in the seven-month-old Telengana agitation but not a single case is pending in any court, not one person is in government custody today except a handful of their leaders in detention. Whereas, for the activities of Naxalites in a couple of pockets, two thousand people have been arrested, dozens were shot dead,

platoons of armed police are stationed in those areas. What for ? To put down the Naxalites ? No. It is to protect the existing order of exploitation in those areas.

Let me quote copiously from the story of the special correspondent of the conservative daily *The Hindu,* who visited the area frequently and answered the most asked question : Why do Naxalites flourish in Srikakulam ?

He traced the origin of the movement not to the inspiration of the Bengal Naxalites or the thoughts of Mao, but "to a trade union movement of Girijan (tribal) farm labourers in 1956." A group of school teachers working in Agency villages built up the movement with processions and hunger-strikes across the years. "Even as late as three years ago, the Naxalite leaders who are now in hiding were organising hunger-strikes in front of revenue offices seeking government intervention for restoring land to Girijans." These demands were ignored until last year when the Chief Minister, who toured the Agency villages, sent a Special Deputy Collector to invalidate the land holdings of plainsmen who had acquired vast stretches of Girijan land through exorbitant rates of interest on petty sums advanced.

How much of this land was cleared from the encroachers ? "Only 77 acres" in the vast 500 square mile Agency area in the district !

What about implementing the Debt Relief Regulation of 1958 ? "Till last week, not a single Girijan had his debt cleared by Government." "Not a single licence was sought for nor given all these decades" for moneylending, though the law prohibited a moneylender from giving loans to Girijans without a special licence issued by the District Collector.

Perhaps, the Government was magnanimous in distributing cultivable waste land which it owns ? According to the correspondent, "Till last September (when this correspondent visited the Agency areas), the banjar lands distributed to Girijans in Agency areas came to 4,377 acres (to 1,075 families, 111 villages)." Last week, the figure was still stagnating at 4,377 acres.

Why ? "Distribution of banjar land is a headache problem and revenue officials are subject to political pressures and strong local influences that inhibit quick decisions."

The Swatantra leader, Mr G. Latchanna, is most excited, more than the Congress, about the Naxalite "menace" and went all the way to talk to the Centre. Congress leaders are of course active all the while through the police machinery. "Some of the landlords have also brought strong political pressures on the district administration to go slow in matters where the Government's declared policy is in favour of the Girijans." (All quotations are from *The Hindu* dated August 8.)

Much more need not be said about what the Girijans are fighting for and why the Naxalites are defending them. If the conditions of the Girijans were so shocking to the special correspondent of such a conservative paper how much more shocking they must be who groan under them. The new Home Minister, Mr J. Vengal Rao, sees in the Naxalite activities only the law and order problem, not the problems of the tribal people whose discontent the Naxalites are reportedly exploiting for their own political purposes.

Naxalites do not mince words ; they mean what they say about armed struggle. Whether they are tactically correct, whether the manner in which they are going about implementing their policy of armed struggle is proper, is another matter.

What kind of people they choose to attack is described by a prominent Congressman of that district and a former Congress legislator : "The problem with the Naxalites and the difficulty in isolating them from the people is this : they choose the most hated and worst exploiter of the people in a village. The whole village heaves a sigh of relief at his elimination and in their heart of hearts they are happy and feel indebted to the Naxalites, though, when police and other leaders go there, they shout about the Naxalite meance and so on."

What is, therefore, in danger in Srikakulam district or elsewhere is not the life of the common people, but the system of

exploitation, the system of usurpation and it is this system and those few individuals and newspapers who have a vested interest in the continuance of this system that are shouting at the top of their voices about the Naxalite menace.

It is no wonder that the Home Minister has been talking openly of repeating the Nanjappa tactics employed during the Telengana struggle of 1948-50 period. He is implementing it with a vengeance. It is said here that if he could nab quite a few Naxalites during the last month, including doctors and students, it is not because of his intelligence system, but because of the betrayal of a top Naxalite leader who blurted out anything and everything he knew or did not know.

The CPI and CPI(M) have of course contested the story of the "encounters" and the arrest of hundreds of people styled as Naxalites, but how much of this is due to the fact that quite a few of their followers have been arrested as Naxalites, has to be seen.

The police drive has come in very handy to the exploiters who call everyone, whom they do not like in the village, a secret supporter of the Naxalites, and the police are always there to oblige them.

According to another conservative Telugu daily, *Andhra Patrika* (July 29), more than the Naxalite activities, the police are proving a headache to the traders and the people in and around the Parvatipuram area.

"It is the practice for Naxalites to write red letters to landlords and rich people. As soon as they receive such letters they rush for police help. The police who arrive to protect them start squeezing them in all sorts of ways. All their necessities have to be met by those who seek their protection. People have now stopped asking them for protection.

"Police have to be fed for only twelve annas per meal in hotels. Because this is a temporary force, the hoteliers get their money from the police authorities very late.....In some places, it has turned out to be begari (forced labour) to meet all the demands of the police."

The correspondent of the *Andhra Patrika* also alleges that some top leaders in the district have a share in the "loot", that they take a share from the Naxalites, keep quiet and so the Naxalites are having their way.

September 6, 1969

HUNT FOR NAXALITES

POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

The Internal Affairs Committee of the Cabinet reviewed the Naxalite problem last week and found that in Andhra Pradesh 10,000 activists were at large and that police action in Srikakulam had largely contained the movement but the movement had spread to other districts in the State. The Andhra Pradesh Home Minister has taken to writing articles on the Naxalites in a big way and in one of his pieces he advanced profound arguments to prove that Naxalites were not communists...because both the CPI and the CPI(M) have disowned them in Andhra Pradesh.

The Centre has no reason to worry about West Bengal and Kerala where Messrs Jyoti Basu and E. M. S. Namboodiripad are quite dependable when it comes to Naxalites but Andhra Pradesh is still a problem. A proposal that figured at the Internal Affairs Committee meeting of the Cabinet aims at inducting the tribals (Girijans) into the police force, the classical British way of breaking up any resistance. The Naxalites are well-entrenched among the tribals and unless their tribes are divided Nagaland-style into hostiles and loyalists, the police can not make any headway.

In the past, the State Government had always maintained that Naxalite activity in Andhra Pradesh was no more than dacoity, while the Central intelligence reports had underlined the political character of the movement. But it is odd that the

two official communist parties, through their reported attempts to minimise the political significance of the movement among the tribals, should be trying to bring their thinking in focus with the State Government's.

In any case, the Centre now wants the Andhra Pradesh Government to speed up land reforms in the State because it sees a long-term solution to the problem of tribal unrest in legislation to prevent the alienation of the tribal from his lands. The Centre wants the Bihar Government to expedite action along similar lines because Naxalite activity has been pronounced in the North Bihar villages.

Even the World Bank expects a big upheaval if the land reform measures are delayed but the State Governments have been dragging their feet. The fact that the Congress could stage the demonstrations in Kerala to demand immediate land reforms by a Communist-led Government is a damning indictment of the United Front parties there. None of the kulak parties are serious about land reforms. Nor is Mr Jagjivan Ram, though he observed recently that the 'green revolution' would turn out to be 'red revolution' if land reforms are not expedited.

The Centre might now act in this direction and mount pressure on some of the States because the World Bank wants the reforms pushed through lest the cussed Naxalites get through. A World Bank expert, Prof. Ladijensky, has already made a report on the Naxalite movement in North Bihar after a detailed spot study. But reports now have it that Mr. Konar, West Bengal Minister in charge of Land Reforms, wants to take the same expert to his State for advice.

Marxism-Leninism does not provide the know-how on land reforms. The World Bank knows it better.

October 11, 1969

Uttar Pradesh

NEW PASTURES FOR CPI

C. K. ARORA

U. P's Right communist leaders, like vultures, enjoy feeding on corpses. They now imagine themselves happily perched in the difficult Terai region where there appears to be a vacuum after the arrest of prominent Naxalites including Mr Vishwanath Tewari. But there is little doubt that the lull in the area —between the Sarda canal and upto the Indo-Nepal border in Lakhimpur-Kheri district—is temporary.

Mr Tewari's colleagues are busy regrouping themselves after a temporary setback. The Right communists have started a new organization, the U. P. Khetiar Mazdoor Sabha. Mr Gur Prasad, a party oldtimer, has been made its steward along with a defeated MLA, Mr Bhikha Lal. Its programme was announced at a "press conference" in a hotel, sufficiently posh by Lucknow standards.

Over a cup of tea, Mr Prasad distributed a three-page cyclostyled press note setting out suggestions—14 in all. It contained a threat to "forcibly occupy big farms in a peaceful manner." The threat, however, has strings attached. The Sabha's volunteers—whose numbers the CPI leaders will not disclose—will carry out the "revolutionary threat" only if the Government pays no heed to their 14 suggestions within two months. To ensure a place for the hand-out in the press, they, besides serving tea and snacks to newsmen, used harsh words against the Naxalites. "There are no Naxalites," Mr Prasad commented and at the same time remarked, "the CPI will fight them. They are enemies of mass movements, adventurous people shy of mass movement."

The U. P. Congress Government which boasts of land reforms is yet to explain where the surplus land has gone. The land, handed over to *gaon sabhas* for distribution among

harijans and landless farm workers, was given to big farmers, industrialists, high military and police officers and other vested interests.

There are four big farms belonging to registered companies : the Pipra farm of the Oudh Sugar Mills owned by the Birlas (4,200 acres of which 500 acres are illegal encroachment), the Jamnabad Farm of 3,000 acres owned by Nevatia of Bajaj group, the Khanjan Nagar Farm of 1200 acres attached to the Lakshmi Sugar Mills and the Collective Farms and Forest Private Limited of 5,000 acres owned by some retired IPS and IAS officers of Punjab.

The local people of the area—Tharus—have been driven away from their land. But the poor farmers of eastern U. P. districts who were forced to quit their homes as a result of high prices due to severe drought in three years in succession started settling in the Terai region of Bahraich and Lakhimpur-Kheri district and brought the surplus land under plough. This created the whole problem. The issue was treated as a law and order problem by the SVD Government led by Mr Charan Singh in which the CPI was one of the constituents. Armed police were sent to the area. The poor farmers were treated like dacoits.

To save themselves from the tyranny of local zamindars and police excesses, the kisans started organizing themselves. Since then clashes between the kisans and the police or the men of the landlords are the order of the day. Anyone who tried to put the issue in the proper perspective was treated like a criminal. Besides others, Mr Tewari endeared himself to the fighting kisans. A prize was announced on his head. He was ultimately arrested. Nine cases, including those of arson, loot and dacoity have been registered against him.

November 15, 1969

Comment

SHOOT TO KILL

What's happening in West Bengal ? The ideologues give out cold statistics of those killed in field and factory and analyse their class of party affiliations. But they are not so perturbed as to urge their government to send armed forces to ensure law and order. Law and order, we know, is for the rich. Those who starve and live like apes in hovels could not care less for the status quo and its warriors.

But the question of law and order continues to be nagging. Up to November 14, 64 people were killed in 'United Front' clashes ; 32 of them swore by the CPI(M) and rest by other parties—the parity being almost a piece of poetic justice. The Home Minister and his men look upon these casualties as inevitable in a class struggle, as the birth pangs of a new order. We also could quote Lenin, Stalin and Mao in justification of this attitude—but for the action ordered in Midnapore.

A report in *The Statesman* (December 3) said the armed forces there have been asked to shoot to kill in the Debra-Gopiballavpur area, if necessary. Women and children are to be spared—if they can be. (They were not, in Naxalbari, in 1967.)

In the troubled Midnapore areas, the Naxalites in their armed struggle have so far finished off more than ten notorious jotedars and moneylenders. The Naxalites there will not ask for, nor be given, any quarter. And in a way their mouthpiece in Calcutta will see to it that there is little sympathy for the victims of police and army action. This weekly revels in the number of exterminated jotedars as an index of revolutionary upsurge—there is jubilation where the head of a man killed is kicked about, though not much is said about what happens to his land and the system he represents. Thanks to this kind of agit-prop, the hungry restless peasant fighters and their dedi-

cated student-comrades, for no fault of their own, may come to be known as the head-hunters of Midnapore. Their ultimate cause and their dedication may be beyond doubt, but why should their mentors make a revolutionary virtue of what Mao would have called excesses—even if excesses are sometimes inevitable ?

Leave the embattled Naxalites to look after themselves, with the prayer that God save them from their Calcutta propagandists. It is the order of the United Front Government which is blatant. If you can turn an indulgent eye to the deaths of so many supporters—many of them landless peasants—how can you ask your forces to shoot to kill where jotedars are involved ? And can you try to fool people by repeating, with a poker face, that the P.D. Act is not being used against political elements in West Bengal ? What about the scores of sympathisers and supporters of Naxalites being arrested in Midnapore ? As for the reported order, the cops under the Marxian Mr Jyoti Basu are unlikely to be more discreet in Midnapore than they were under the Gandhian Mr Ajoy Mukherjee in Naxalbari, or at Durgapur, or in the West Bengal Assembly this year. In 1967 it is suspected that Mr Mukherjee gave a secret order to the police to go ahead with a relentless combing and mopping up operation, ignoring an agreed decision of the Cabinet. But Mr Jyoti Basu as Home Minister needs no such secrecy in Midnapore. It is, after all, a grim ideological battle against former comrades who are outside the joint family of the United Front and whose influence is spreading.

Think of it, the other day Comrade Sundarayya sent a telegram protesting against the killing of arrested Naxalites in the Srikakulam area. There is of course a difference between killing people in action and killing the detained. But is Mr Sundarayya cocksure that the police and the Eastern Frontier Rifles in Midnapore will be angels ?

There are so many contradictions in West Bengal that it is hard to draw up a clear picture and this paper also reflects the confusion. Indeed, it is not for nothing that *Goopy Gyne*

Bagha Byne is so popular. It does have a symbolism which Satyajit Ray did not think of. The magnanimity of the king of ghosts is touching, but then you have the dance of the ghosts of various classes belabouring each other to death. West Bengal is ripe for radical, violent changes. Even the perverse inter-party tumult in the countryside is a symptom of mounting peasant anger, but the anger is being led astray. Whoever has seen such murderous division in the name of a peasant movement ? In 1967 the 'peaceful' Sonarpur experiment had curious features—camp courts and police camps, but the line-up against the jotedars was more or less clear. But parliamentary arithmetic—Congress 127 in 1967 and 55 now—has changed the apporach : the main enemy is dead, let us fight for the spoils. But the king—or queen—of ghosts is very much alive and stirring while the dance goes on in the Secretariat, in factory and on field. Perhaps it is wrong to differentiate the king from his men. They are all his conscious or unconscious tools.

December 13, 1969

Kerala

MURDER IN WYNAAD

RAMJI

A. Verghese, the young Naxalite leader, was murdered in cold blood by the police ; shot dead, tied to a post, at Tirunelly, in the Wynaad forests of north Kerala. This came as a climax to the "effectiveness" and "virility" of the police force, under the new dispensation of the mini-front Ministry.

Of course, despite the ruthless police onslaughts on the people all over the State, we know that the police can do no wrong, that they are the guardians of the fundamental rights of the people through liberal and indiscriminate use of lathis and guns on all and sundry.

And so, Verghese was shot dead in an 'encounter' with the police, the sort of encounter so familiarly trotted out in Srikakulam. According to police reports, they came upon Verghese sheltered behind rocks in his hide-out and he fired upon the police party, who returned the fire and a bullet pierced his heart. As proof of Verghese's belligerence a photo of his dead body was published, with the chin resting on a piece of rock and with one eye closed. The police say that this closed eye is sufficient proof that Verghese was in the act of taking aim with his gun when the police bullet pierced his heart. It is a tribute to the close cooperation of the police and the big press that the news reports eulogise the bravery and the indomitable determination of the police in facing great vicissitudes in their manhunt inside the wilderness, while they dub Verghese a murderer and dacoit. This is a clear indication that times have changed and that the big newspapers, along with the police, have the right to accuse and sit in full and final judgment over the culprits chosen by them.

But facts contradict the police statement. It is clear that the police had pre-planned to kill Verghese and his companions. With the precedent of the cases in connection with the raids on Tellichery and Pulpalli police stations which still drag on, the police, obviously, were aware that it would be difficult to prove any charges against Verghese or his companions. The only solution was to take the law into their own hands. Which the police did. The spot where Verghese is alleged to have made his last stand while in hiding affords no ghost of a chance for hiding. It is a bare patch of open ground, which no sane person could use for his shelter, much less one being hunted by a veritable army of armed police. On the other hand, it is an ideal place for a firing squad to operate. And this was the sum and substance of the "encounter." It is gathered that Verghese was caught while sleeping in a hut in a sheltered nook, some two furlongs away from the spot where he was murdered. The police entered via the roof removing the tiles and caught Verghese. From the house he was taken across a

paddy field to the police camp near Tirunelly temple. He was tortured most mercilessly. One eye was gouged out and when his life was nearly extinct under the torture, he was tied to a post and shot dead.

People in the locality testify to this in private, but they are too afraid of the mighty police force camped in the area to make any public statement. It is significant that within an hour of his capture the news reached the Cannanore Deputy Superintendent of Police's office. On enquiry there, it was revealed that he had been captured. This was confirmed by the local office of *Manorama*, the mass circulation Malayalam daily, which has all along been playing the role of publicity and propaganda agency of the police. But five to six hours later, the official news came that Verghese had been shot dead in an encounter in which he fired on the police. The police, as usual in such encounters, did not suffer a scratch even.

A huge army of police with machine-guns, rifles, walkie-talkie equipment, dogs and other outfit, started combing the Wynaad forests after some houses in Tirunelly and Trissaleri had been looted by a gang of armed persons and two house-holders shot dead by them. The operations of the police in the Wynaad forests have been projected at length by the press as object lessons in the sense of duty, supreme courage and fortitude. However, their objective seemed insignificant compared to the size and scope of the army thrown into the operation : just half a dozen alleged dacoities and murders. That in spite of such massive preparations four men escaped their clutches is also another curious feature of the police version. It is alleged by the police that these four threw bombs at the police party. Yet no policeman was hurt. The assailants escaped. Before that they had discarded a gun. Maybe they had decided to eschew violence and take to satyagraha ! Anyway, this gave rise to much publicity and the police redoubled their activities which resulted in the killing of Verghese.

The police army in the Wynaad forests have been perpetrating atrocities on the tribals, called Kurichiyars. They are

suspect. For, under Verghese's leadership the Kurichiyars had organised themselves and fought for and secured better wages and better treatment at the hands of the landlords. Even otherwise, it is well known that without the knowledge and co-operation of the tribals, it is impossible for anyone to operate inside the forest or to take shelter there. Thus the police have been 'investigating' in the Wynaad forest with a vengeance. The investigation procedure is : torturing the illiterate, nearly inarticulate tribals, raping their womenfolk who still go about topless, and in other ways performing their duties as the absolute autocrats of the State. It is interesting to note that the CPI, which even organised a Defence Committee in support of the accused in the Pulpalli-Tellichery police station raid cases, is now heading a Government in which the police have taken to judgment and execution, reminiscent of front-line techniques during war.

The police zoolum in the State has started provoking murmurs from pro-mini fronters too. The parliamentary system and the formal peaceful agitations that go with it come more naturally to the Marxist leadership than the risks and sufferings that go with the act of resisting police atrocities along the 'front lines' in Kuttanad and elsewhere. It is plain that most of the present Marxist leaders have become too soft to do anything more than pay lip-service to any organised, violent revolt against intolerable conditions which the present administration is providing in plenty to the have-nots.

March 14, 1970

IN AND AROUND JADAVPUR

B. BOSE

A series of incidents involving people connected with Jadavpur University occurred in April. A teacher, Mr Soumen Pal, reportedly a CP(M) supporter, was assaulted in North Calcutta while returning home. On April 29, Rajat Ghatak, a Naxalite student, was assaulted in the Chittaranjan Colony. He died in hospital on May 1. On April 29 night, a CP(M) student was attacked in the University. On Thursday, April 30, the University was closed sine die, violence having been anticipated. The same night, however, a group of rowdies entered the dining hall of the SPT Hostel and a boy, one of the residents, was stabbed to death. The boy was reportedly a Naxalite sympathiser, but had no direct party affiliations.

A short statement was issued by the Registrar on May 3, expressing his grief over the death and commenting that it was the inevitable consequence of party clashes. But, the personal safety of students within the University campus being at least partly the responsibility of the University authorities, it is hardly satisfactory as an explanation for this gruesome and unprecedented occurrence.

True, it was a spill-over from the murderous tension in a wide zone. In the revolutionary belligerence between the CP(M) and the CP(ML) in the Jadavpur-Haltu areas of 24-Parganas, knives and bombs are used freely. In those areas the CRP and Eastern Frontier Rifles protect the party offices of the CP(M) and also the residential homes of individual CP(M) leaders. But the problem is a bit deeper from the CP(M) point of view. Almost in every CP(M) family, younger members are either Naxalites or their sympathisers.

Most of the Naxalite victims are not "Congress-sponsored

goondas." As a matter of fact, most of them were, at least one year back, strong activists of CP(M).

The history of the present three-month-old state of tension and conflict between the two parties can be traced to the last period of UF rule when in the CP(M) itself a psychological gap was growing steadily between its relatively aged cadres and the younger ones. The gap mostly arose from (i) the leadership's different tactical moves in the local trade union movements in Krishna Glass factory, Sulekha Works or Jay Engineering Works ; (ii) mutual distrust among the cadres in the peasant movements of Kalikapur ; (iii) different political assessments of the Naxalite movement throughout the country ; and (iv) alleged suspicion of the militant cadres among the leadership and promotion of those cadres to the higher echelons of the party who are apathetic to struggles but loyal to "dadas" in the matter of spying over the militant cadres or satisfying the personal ambitions of the local leaders. A few months back, a big section of the party's younger cadres came out of the CP(M) and joined the CP(ML).

Mutual distrust between the two parties has infected the entire area and the result was at least five murders of CP(ML) supporters or members and at least one murder of a CP(M) supporter. On both sides there are cases of innumerable physical assault, just short of murder. Every evening one sees CP(M) processions chanting slogans like "We want blood for blood", "Congress-Naxal same, don't forget, don't forget."

In the battle, the CP(M) enjoys some advantage over its opponents. In the first place, undesirable local elements entered its ranks during the UF rule. Secondly, the CP(M) has no fear of the police to the extent CP(ML) has, mainly because of police witch-hunt for the Naxalites. As a result, while the CP(M) can take out processions the CP(ML) cannot. Thirdly, the CP(M) believes in taking the help of the police in getting the Naxalites rounded up and therefore it can run to the nearest police station in case any of its sympathisers is assaulted, while the Naxalites cannot afford to do that. The CP(ML) has

to bank fully for shelter on the local people who for political and other reasons are more anti-CP(M) than pro-Naxalites.

From the study of the various incidents taking place in the Jadavpur-Santoshpur-Haltu areas one cannot avoid making certain observations.

The murderous moves and counter-moves between the two parties are characteristic of individual areas, and areas inhabited by middle-strata people. Such features are conspicuously absent in Bankura, Birbhum, Midnapore, Jalpaiguri and even in the interior areas of 24-Parganas where in the villages the CP(M) comes rarely into conflict with CP(ML) supporters. This may be due to a tacit understanding between the two parties that their respective areas should not be disturbed by each other. The stronger reason may be that as both the parties confront common enemies like jotedars, moneylenders and other village parasites, they can hardly afford mutual quarrels over ideology and action. Besides, the Naxalites do not preach land-grabbing as the only way out. Such quarrels are reserved for the petty bourgeois residing in the town areas and far away from the actual scene of grim class struggle in the countryside.

In most of the towns, younger people are turning more and more to the Naxalites. The CP(M) leaders can hardly attract this generation because of their stereotyped economic slogans and the growing gap between revolutionary precept and parliamentary practice. In essence, the areas where the CP(M) has come organisationally into conflict with CP(ML) supporters, the actual fight takes place between the old generation who are psychologically inert or lukewarm on the question of the status quo (which, they hope, may offer them good dividends in terms of MLAs, MPs and ministry-making) and the younger generation who find no ray of hope (not even parliamentary rewards) and therefore find nothing to lose from the quick destruction of the system. In the middle-strata areas, therefore, it is a fight between surreptitious craving for parliamentary rewards resulting in conservatism in practice, and frustrated

impatience over the existing state of affairs leading to some adventurist actions.

These conflicts dig the revolutionaries' own graves in the town areas and the result may be an upsurge of counter-revolutionary forces out to destroy particularly the Naxalites and then, similar to the fate of German Social Democrats, the CP(M) cadres. By any calculation, the Naxalites should be the dearest ally of the CP(M) ranks if the latter truly believe in and practise revolution. The main danger in Bengal today is the different shades of revisionism within and outside the CP(M). Every Naxalite dead rings the death knell of the militancy and revolutionary practice, if any, of the CP(M) cadres.

May 16, 1970

Letter

JADAVPUR

Though Mr B. Bose in his 'In and Around Jadavpur' (May 16) wants us to believe that Chavan's police and paramilitary forces have been deployed in the Jadavpur-Santoshpur areas solely to protect the CP(M) offices, activists and sympathizers, the picture is really different. On the morning of May 10, the Joint Secretary of the Jadavpur University Employees' Union, a CP(M) sympathiser, was beaten up by CP(ML) activists in Santoshpur and was ordered to leave the locality within a fortnight. No police came to protect him. Some other leaders of that Union and CP(M) supporters who live in the Santoshpur area are playing hide and seek with the young revolutionaries only to avoid being annihilated by them. Neither the CRP and EFR are on the scene, nor has their help been sought so far. On the other hand, two local CP(ML)

leaders and other activists, none of whom are desirable elements, are moving around freely.

One would have been happier if the CP(ML) ranks had come close to those of the CP(M). But this will not happen so long as the CP(ML) cadres go on beheading their potential allies. Revolution in the city is being undone. Only some Mao-quoting Inu Mitras are cropping up.

BUDDHADEV SENGUPTA

May 23, 1970 Calcutta

NAXALITES IN ASSAM

KAMRUPEE

Up to now, newspaper reports on the Naxalite activities in Assam can be considered under three distinct phases.

The first phase was the news of arrest of Mr Syed Hussain Shah, a former member of the CPI(M) provincial committee (expelled for following a 'left adventurist' line) in March. The police were after him for nearly two years ; on his arrest, the story put out was that he was the leader of a conspiracy to create an 'independent' Assam, of course in predictable collusion not merely with China and Pakistan, but the rebel Naga and Mizo elements as well.

The second phase was the statement made on the floor of the Assam Assembly in Shillong by the present de facto leader of the ACLP, Mr M. M. Chowdhury. The headline to the story as it appeared in *The Assam Tribune* is a pointer to the shape of things to come : TOP WEST BENGAL NAXALITES ENTER ASSAM. These troublesome elements were not merely subversive, but alien as well !

The third phase was the arrest of about sixty persons (April 26) from near Ghograpar, and the discovery of an actual conspiracy afoot. Thus the report in part :

Police said that the Naxalites had established a full-fledged district committee of the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) in Goalpara district bordering Pakistan besides setting up a chain of 'shelters' in various parts of the State, mostly in rural areas.

...The Naxalites, according to the police, have established training centres in Goalpara and Cachar districts which 'significantly border East Pakistan'... The police have listed eight top Naxalite leaders from West Bengal who had been operating in Assam during the last more than one year (sic) and indoctrinating landless peasants in their ideology of violence.

Several select batches of potential Naxalite workers had also been taken to Jalpaiguri and other places of North Bengal for 'higher training' in guerilla warfare during the past several months, the police said.

(*The Assam Tribune* April 28, 1970)

Incidentally, almost the whole of this police 'intelligence' derives from the openly available leaflet of the Goalpara District Committee of the CPI(ML). But what is disturbing is the quite open suggestion that all Naxalite activities are Bengali-inspired and led.

In Assam, the Muslim-phobia and the Bengali-phobia, considered separately, are significant enough ; but combined, they promise to take formidable proportions. A bourgeois social structure seems to *need* such external enemies to keep it from falling apart as a result of its internal contradictions. In Assam, the situation holds the promise of an even greater danger because the 'racial' question is much more delicate here than in other parts of the country. The 'Assamese', quite apart from having had to face the problems arising out of a confusion between his geographical and cultural identities, had had further frustrations to endure, including the absence of a widely distributed Assamese capitalist elite. The belief in 'external enemies' comes easier to him at least partly because of the considerable objective reasons that exist to sustain such a

belief. The Naxalites are seeking to show the enemy within, and because of this, even the extremely limited capitalist elite of Assam has a stake in wiping out this 'menace'. So, one can expect the ruling class to employ every device at its disposal to isolate and destroy the Naxalites, and if a little bit of stirring of racial and communal hatred is going to do the trick, the government machinery can be trusted to do all the stirring.

"A single spark kindles a prairie fire" : Thus the latest issue of *Liberation* quotes, and the single spark according to this journal, has been the murder of two landlords in Goalpara district (three by the latest count). May be ; but this writer, hampered as he is by his non-proletarian background and training, finds it difficult to believe that revolution is round the corner in Assam. But what does seem to be round the corner is growing radicalisation and militancy, particularly in the rural areas ; there is also the prospect of this militancy being matched by various forms of official repression. Also, it is extremely likely that agrarian violence, when (not if) it breaks out, is going to take on a racial and a communal overtone, at least in its initial stages. Only a genuinely revolutionary leadership seems to be capable of directing the ensuing violence along the correct class lines. I think, it would be premature to identify the revolutionary peasant movements in Assam entirely with the CPI(ML). The proximity of areas of North Bengal has caused such an identification to establish itself in the popular mind. But in the long run, any mechanical application of a slogan, say like the one that says that China's Chairman is our Chairman, is not going to work in Assam. What is needed is a creative application of the slogan, and no doubt the lessons are going to be learnt as the movement marches on. But here again, one who is outside the movement can hardly presume to lay down the correct line ; but it seems to me that cultural revolutionary gestures as those symbolized by the raid on railway colony school at Lamding not merely hold no promise of a real change, but on the contrary provide the grounds for a regional identification of the revolutionary

elements. But here again, it is difficult to be categorical. Each day, each event seems now to hold promise of a sustained and continuous revolutionary activity. Some of these, no doubt, are going to be 'childish pranks' (which are also in the same breath going to be condemned as threats to the security of the State). The less publicised silent work of party cadres in rural areas is going to yield fruits in the long run.

May 23, 1970

ASSAM : A SECOND WARNING

A CORRESPONDENT

The Assam Government is ruthless in its operation against the Naxalites. Even near-octogenarians have been arrested. The arrested are tortured and implicated in got-up cases. Scores of houses are being raided for Naxalite literature and journals. With nightfall, unknown passers-by and tourists are sometimes dragged into police stations and interrogated for clues as to the whereabouts of 'Naxalite fugitives'. Fantastic stories are being manufactured by politicians and the Press in order to scare people about the Naxalites 'who are out to sell the country to Red China.' All brave talk about fighting the Naxalites 'politically' has now been substituted by attempts to terrorise the people into silence. But the stark fact is that the more the Government practises fascist nonsense the more it is pushing people to the side of the Naxalites.

The Government has now openly given us to understand that it does not fear so much even the Naga-Mizo armed rebellion as it does Mao's thoughts. So one can quite comfortably conclude that it is Mao's thoughts which are flowing into Assam, not arms, however hard the Government may try to create such an impression.

In preparing the ground for launching the drive more ruthlessly than it has been doing over the past few weeks, it has been wise enough to refer to the conditions prevalent in Assam, conditions which are responsible for giving rise to the Naxalbari movement. It has suddenly come to realise that lakhs of young men are still unemployed in the State, that scores of people are dying of starvation each week in Goalpara district alone (of course, the reasons for these are never explained). At the same time it also warns that all these 'unfortunate' conditions should not be viewed as justifying a dangerous movement like Naxalbari. It wants the situation to be tackled by 'democratic' means. It has also given a clarion call to the 'leftist' parties to educate people in 'democratic principles' and to help it fight back the Naxalite menace. The opposition leader in the Assam Legislative Assembly has been assured by the Chief Minister that all repressive measures now let loose will be strictly limited to the Naxalites. The Government has been able to forge a covert alliance with the 'leftist' parties so far as the anti-Naxalite drive is concerned.

No leftist party in the State has, as yet, tried to call the bluff. On the contrary, some political parties outside the ruling Congress are also trying to draw political sustenance by subscribing to the Government propaganda, though in a different way. When the so-called leftist parties are almost dead in this State, except for occasional wrangles over certain self-perpetuating political issues, no wonder that the Naxalbari movement has been gaining ground with every passing day.

The Assam Government knows quite well that police and military forces are not enough to put down the movement. It has already employed Jana Sangh agents to foment communal tension in Goalpara district where thousands of starving peasants have been struggling hard against feudal overlordship over the past few years. However hard the agents provocateur may try to wreck communal harmony, both the Hindu and the Muslim peasants have learnt through all these years who are their real enemies. Since the trick is not working in Goalpara,

the Government has now turned its attention to misleading people into believing that some 'outsiders' are hell-bent on spreading the Naxalbari flame in Assam. Everybody knows who are these 'outsiders' the Government often refers to. Government sources have also kept saying that people belonging to a particular community living in Assam are providing shelter to these 'outsiders'. And the brazen way in which the Government propaganda machinery has been playing up the 'issue' suggests that it will not stop until a major communal flare-up has engulfed the Brahmaputra Valley. Once communal frenzy erupts in the Brahmaputra Valley it will not remain confined there. The present APHLC leaders of what has today come to be known as Meghalaya will also take full advantage of the situation as a step towards suppressing the hill people's discontents now boiling under the lid.

June 6, 1970

West Bengal

FRANKLY SPEAKING

SANJOY

One has to admire our conscientious police force. It has, after a winter of hibernation under the UF, returned to activity and is facing a Herculean or Sisyphean task. Thirty or forty thousand warrants are to be executed. Quite a few of the recalcitrants are armed and do not hesitate to retaliate. Intelligence people are being waylaid and assaulted, the police hospital is kept rather busy. The capture of an English girl by the Bihar police and joint interrogation may not be enough consolation.

The police know or should know why they are being attacked. The treatment they mete out to most of the arrested

is barbarous. Meet some of those who had to be released on bail and they will tell you what is happening. The details are sickening. The Berhampore incident last week brought to light the torture of an arrested government employee. If one thinks that the arrests have, in most cases, anything to do with specific charges, one is living in a world of his own.

Among the arrested, Naxalites fall into a specific category. They are all part of a conspiracy to overthrow the regime by violent means and therefore no means is bad enough against them. However, they can take it. They and their supporters disdain to whine. They say that they will pay back the police in their own coin, that they are determined to teach the armed thugs let loose on the State by Chavan and the local bosses a good lesson.

There is no public concern yet over police atrocities. Our approach is partisan. There is protest in party papers against the treatment of people belonging to or having sympathies for a particular party, not against police atrocities in general. This is one of the effects of the revolutionary rule of the UF ! A Naxalite, released on bail, was wondering why there is not even liberalism in this country. There was an air of liberalism before the opposition parties had a taste of power. Power, even the crumbs of power, do make pragmatists of our revolutionaries. If the UF could shoot down ten women in a State like West Bengal and get away with it, it cannot, once out of power, start a united movement against police repression and sadism. Repression, if not naked, will be there when some form of 'popular' government is again formed.

So far as the Naxalites are concerned, they suffer from another disadvantage. After a raid on an educational institution, it is now given out that they have burnt a picture, not of *Gandhi alone*, but also pictures of Ramakrishna or Vivekananda or Netaji or Rabindranath. About Gandhiji, most Bengalis do not bother much. Not because they believe in violence, but because of the way the Mahatma treated Subhas Bose. That memory still rankles. That is why, perhaps, pictures of

Bengali heroes are being mentioned in the press, whether at all they were burnt or not. And in view of this 'vandalism' the petty bourgeoisie is not worked up over the swarms of arrested men and the reports of torture.

It will be some time perhaps before the story of who is doing what in Calcutta becomes a little clearer. The attack on the Gandhi Centre in Jadavpur University may have caught on and the Naxalite leaders perhaps did not want to dampen their youthful and restless adherents. The price has been heavy. In course of days other elements might have entered the fray to damn the Naxalites. For, one should recall, Charu Majumdar had urged the students, a few days before *Deshabrati* fell on evil days, to go to villages and work among the landless. A programme of action for cities was not outlined.

A few words about *Deshabrati*, the Bengali weekly of the CP(ML). It has not been banned by the government. What has happened is that some 20 compositors, loyal and hard working, were arrested and all the types seized. Warrants against the compositors are pending—from Midnapore, from perhaps Bihar and Assam, perhaps also from France where a number of bombs explode now and then. So how can the police release them, even on bail ?

June 6, 1970

Comment

DEATH IN ANDHRA

A CORRESPONDENT

The Home Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Mr J. Vengal Rao, is a proud man today. He must have put on Bolivian airs when he called a press conference at a short notice to announce the annihilation of Satyanarayana and Kailasam.

Mr Vengal Rao has promised to give Rs. 16,000 to the police party which killed Satyanarayana and Kailasam. The reward is too insignificant for the achievement.

For Satyanarayana had become a legendary figure in the course of the movement in Srikakulam. He was the master-mind behind it. Starting as a school teacher, he identified himself completely with the arduous struggle of the Girijans against landlords, moneylenders and a system that stinks. It was his experience that led him to Maoism and once he was convinced of the necessity of armed struggle he never turned back. His dedication, courage and initiative will not be forgotten by his followers. Parties not believing in his tactics and strategy will of course pay tribute to him as an individual but at the same time be glad in their hearts that he has been removed for ever from his people. The jubilation of the Brahmananda Reddys and the Vengal Raos is however temporary. In fact, things at least in certain areas in the country are taking a turn which even the new Union Home Minister will find it difficult to check.

July 18, 1970

Letter

WRITERS' NEW UNION

The much-awaited polarisation has taken place in the Telugu literary world with the split in the Progressive Writers' Association on July 4, 1970.

Even before its emergence, there were revolutionary writers and poets like Subbarao Panigrahi, the warrior-poet and ballad-singer, who was shot dead by the police in an encounter in the hilly forests of Srikakulam in 1969. Panigrahi had mobilised the people wherever he went with his "Jamukula

Katha" (a popular folklore form of storytelling) troupe. Nasser is another revolutionary poet-singer, who is educating people with his "Burra Katha" (another folklore form) troupe.

The formation of the RWA came like a bolt from the blue to the inactive and reactionary class-collaborators of the PWA when they, with the aid of the State Government, were about to couduct a seminar on "Progressive" literature to felicitate the revolutionary poet Sri Sri, the author of *Mahaprasthanam*, at Hyderabad. It is noteworthy that Sri Sri along with the young "Digambara" and "Thirugubatu" poets, has boycotted the Government-sponsored seminar and refused personal felicitations. The RWA has been formed at Hyderabad with Sri Sri as its President, Messrs Kutumba Rao and Ravi Sastry as Vice-Presidents and Mr. Ramana Reddy as the Secretary. Other office-bearers include "Digambara" and "Thirugubatu" poets.

The bourgeois press publicised the RWA as "Naxalites in Literature" and hurriedly published "interviews" with reactionaries in literature like Nori and Viswanatha. Viswanatha has gone even to the extent of making a sinister suggestion to the Government that it should take police action against the members of the RWA.

It is a fact that "Progressive Literature" was useful to many, including Sri Sri, as a passport to enter the cinema, radio and the reactionary consciousness, and become class enemies. The formation of the RWA, thus, became a historical necessity. In spite of his revolutionary zeal, Sri Sri is known for his modesty and oscillating tendencies. The youth are carefully watching with hope that RWA will play a significant role in rendering unequivocal support to peoples' revolution.

K. V. SOMAYAJULU
Vizianagram

July 25, 1970

Letter

SUBBARAO PANIGRAHI

Mr Somayajulu's contention (July 25) that Subbarao Panigrahi, the warrior-poet of Srikakulam, was killed in an encounter is quite wrong. There has never been an encounter between the police and the communist revolutionaries in Andhra. The fact is that Panigrahi was captured by the police and was tortured for half a day. They told him that he would be produced in court if he resigned from the CPI(ML). When Panigrahi refused to do so, they shot him dead.

G. V. S. RAO
Bhubaneswar

August 29, 1970

FRANKLY SPEAKING

SANJOY

The CP(ML) which, according to the CPM, is disrupting the democratic movement, is going through a spell of ill-luck so far as the organisation is concerned. Some of the best cadres in Srikakulam have been killed in the last few months, including Satyanarayana and Kailasam on the night of July 10-11. On July 24, the two other Andhra Pradesh members of the Central Committee were arrested in Calcutta. The police are croaking—the situation, Mrs. Gandhi will be told, is excellent. As is inevitable, the police are trying to round up as many Naxalites as possible, under any pretext. On July 20, the Vietnam day meeting at Azad Hind Park was encircled by the police, though it was not an unlawful assembly. A few bombs were thrown and the rest followed. After the haul, the new Police Commissioner said, he had definite information of a plan to attack the USIS, the Russian and U.S. Consulates

and cinema houses showing foreign films. The next day, while producing the arrested in the court, the police said they had tried to disturb an examination being held in Bethune College ! It also turned out that the arrested belonged to those Naxalite groups who do not believe in CP(ML) tactics. But the police story which the newspapers headlined is what people will remember, particularly when the Commissioner is so chummy with the Tata newspaper in the city—the Sooterkin street string of newspapers fell foul of him after he had played down, perhaps correctly, to Jyoti Basu, the then Home Minister, an attack on their offices. According to the police, Mr Charu Majumdar had a narrow escape on July 24.

It should now be pretty obvious that the police have succeeded in infiltrating part of the CP(ML) communication system. Otherwise so many people would not have been caught unawares and killed in Srikakulam and others arrested there and in West Bengal. The fact of police infiltration does not necessarily mean that this or that party is wrong, but it indicates a lack of vigilance. This is all the more surprising in the case of the CP(ML) which believes in secret organisation.

August 1, 1970

West Bengal

A NOVEMBER NIGHT AT BELIAGHATA

Let others speak this week.

The MPs who visited Calcutta recently "to hear and see the victims of police atrocities in West Bengal" had very little time in hand because Parliament was in session and the debate on the promulgation of the Prevention of Violent Activities Act was coming up for discussion. The investigating MPs were : V. K. Krishna Menon, Sayeed Baddruddaja, Janab Bakar Ali Mirza, Hiren Mukherjee, Arun P. Chatterjee, Suhrid Ranjan

Mullick Chowdhury, Salil Ganguli, Shib Chandra Jha and Jyotirmoy Bosu.

When they visited Beliaghata they heard a large number of people. The report (abridged), circulated under the signature of Shri Jyotirmoy Bosu, is as follows :

(1) Shri Bidyut Kumar Das, Age 18 years, of Flat No. 3/15, son of Shri Nripendra Das, said :

On November 19/20 at about 3 o'clock at night the police came to their house and knocked at the door. When his father opened the door, they asked him where his sons were. When he was produced before the police by his father, one of the officers asked him, 'Where are the stencils of Mao Tse-tung ?'' He said he did not do any politics nor did he belong to any party. They took him out on the street and put him in one of the police vans. In the van he found six persons—a man of 45-50 years who was taken as the police could not get his son, four young men—one of them was Asoke Bose, and the other three, whose hands were tied with ropes, belonged to the same building, and Asoke's younger brother.

A police officer came and asked for Asoke. When he responded, the officer asked him, how many policemen he had murdered. Asoke said, he had not murdered a single police-man. Then the police officer wanted to know how far he had read. Asoke said, he was still a student of the 3rd year of Jadavpur University. The officer asked him, what lessons he got there. Did they teach him to manufacture bombs ? Asoke said, he did not manufacture bombs nor did he learn to make them. The officer flashed a big torch on his face and when he blinked, he hit him hard 2/3 times with the end of the torch. He fell down.

The police officer then asked Bidyut various questions. He was kicked on the knees. All of them were then made to sit in the van. From the van he could see that the police had also rounded up 50 young men on the street. At about 4 o'clock the van started moving and came to a halt near a place called Balurchar, a canal which is filled with sand and earth, at

the end of the CIT Buildings. Then an officer, who was identified to him as Debi Roy, DC, DD, by a young man named Sabbu, who was later shot dead by the police, called Asoke by his name and asked him to get down from the van. The other three boys, whose hands were tied with ropes from the beginning, were pushed from the van and they fell on the ground. After they were taken away he heard sounds of firing. He heard cries, "Oh mother". Then the van went away.

About 1,500 policemen in 44 vans raided this locality on the night of the 19th November and the whole operation was conducted by Debi Roy, DC, DD. In reply to a question by Mr V. K. Krishna Menon, Bidyut said, police knocked at every door—about 556 flats. The other arrested men who were later produced in the court were released on bail.

All the persons who were in the van were assaulted. The police abused them, saying "Mao Tse-tung is your father."

(2) Mrs Protima Biswas, wife of Shri Sachindra Nath Biswas, who is a typist-clerk in the office of DS (Engineer), Dhanbad Division, residing at Flat No. 10/10A said : Her son, Tapan Biswas, had passed B. Com. two years ago. At present he is reading Cost Accountancy by postal correspondence.

On the night of November 19, he and an adopted son of hers named Ajit were arrested by the police. Next day, on November 20, almost all the persons were granted bail except her son and a few others. For two consecutive days he was severely tortured by the police. On November 21, at about 5 p. m. she heard a rumour that her son would be shot dead. Hearing this she became almost mad and immediately went to Beliaghata thana. With folded hands and with tears in her eyes she prayed to the OC that she be permitted to see her son once. Her son was then produced before her and it was evident from the marks on his body that he had been beaten mercilessly. She was in the thana until 10 p. m. She told the OC that since she was apprehending that her son would be shot dead she would not leave the thana premises and would stay there the whole night, if need be. But the OC assured

her that the boy would not be killed. On the 25th he was produced before the court. He is still in jail (at the time the report was drawn up).

(3) Mrs Parul Rani Sen, widow of the late Satyendra Mohan Sen of 8B/55, CIT Buildings :

Her son, Sankar Sen, was taken from the bed by the police on the 19th night. He was mercilessly beaten in the lock-up and has not been granted bail. He is to appear at the Higher Secondary Examination this year.

(4) Shri Umesh Chandra Bose, the father of Asoke Bose, the boy who was shot dead by the police on the 19th night, said :

I work in a small factory. My son was a 3rd year Engineering student of Jadavpur University. At 2 o'clock that night the police knocked at the door. When I opened the door, the police pointing at Asoke said, "Is this your son ?" I said, "Yes." They also pulled out my youngest son, Ashim, aged about 14, from his bed. Their mother started crying. She prayed to the policemen to allow her to see them. They said she could see them in the police station and in the court. Then they took them away.

The whole day I was in the court for bail. In the evening when the police van arrived, my youngest son, Ashim, got down from the van but Asoke did not. Next day, November 21, a news-item carrying the police version of Asoke's death appeared in the press. I went to the morgue immediately and identified my son. I was not allowed to take Asoke's body for the last rites, without permission from the police. I went to the thana. There I was told that they would not allow me to take the body. Their car with their men would take me to the morgue and the body would be taken to the burning ghat (Nimtola) in their van only. They gave me some papers.

I have seen five bullet marks on his person—one on the forehead, one on the left breast, one on the groins, one on the lower abdomen and the last one on the leg. The police, however, did not utter a single word about how my son was killed.

(5) Mrs Lakshmi Banerjee, wife of Shri Moloy Banerjee, an employee of National Tannery, residing at 4 East Beliaghata Main Road, Milan Nagar, across the canal, said :

On the 19/20th at about 5 o'clock in the morning I saw from my house a black jeep netted with wire coming across the canal. I also saw another black van coming along with the jeep. Then I saw four young boys, whom I knew—they were young boys of our locality—taken out of the van by the police. They were made to stand in a row near the "Mankachu" tree. After that a police officer started firing at them—this I saw with my own eyes. I heard about 17 or 18 rounds of firing. It was quite light and I could recognise the police and two of the four young boys, namely Asoke Bose and Swapan Mojumdar. The persons who did the shooting seemed to be police officers and not constables. Asoke Bose, before dying cried out, "Nakshalbari Lal Selam" and Swapan, "Save me, save me". The place was running with blood. After the killing the bodies were thrown inside the van and the police officers tried to cover up the blood marks with sand. After the police left the place, I, along with my husband and other people of the building, went near the spot and found blood marks which the police officers had tried to cover with sand were still there.

(6) Shri Niharendra Nath Sen, son of Shri Rajendra Nath Sen, said :

I am a third year student of Gurudas College. My father is a retired Cashier of Calcutta State Transport Corporation. On the 19th November I went to my sister's house. At night some policemen came to the house and knocked at the door. When I opened the door, they asked me who I was and what I was doing. I gave them my name and said that I was a student. Then they arrested me. They slapped me. Some of the police officers' faces were covered with mufflers perhaps to avoid identification. They used filthy language. According to them, all the people in these buildings were Naxalites and all were swines. They took me by my collar and put me into

a van. While in the van I saw all the policemen looking for Asoke Bose. They were shouting, "Where is Asoke, where is Asoke ?" I then saw a covered coloured vehicle near the junction. When we tried to peep outside, we were told by the policemen to turn our faces, otherwise they would shoot us and in fear we turned our faces. After some time we heard sounds of firing.

We were then taken to the police station and kept in the lock-up where we were beaten mercilessly.

The statement circulated by Shri Joytirmoy Bosu, MP, says that the story of a bomb fight in Beliaghata, which was published in the press, is nothing but a cock and bull story. "Similarly, near Shyampukur Park, we heard how a small boy of 14, who had suffered a mental shock from typhoid, was dragged out from his neighbour's house for no fault of his own and shot dead in broad daylight near the park by policemen".

The MPs also recorded evidence of the brutal manner in which Nani Saha of Belgharia was murdered by policemen on the street.

"On Shyampukur Road, the Chakraborty brothers, one of whom was serving in the Calcutta Police and another in the NVF, which is a Government Force, were killed by a Deputy Commissioner of Police and an Inspector under the very nose of their mother and brother. There are also numerous other cases, which have not come to light as we have not been able to go to all the places.

"Another interesting thing is that four of us, namely Prof. Hiren Mukherjee, Shri Tridib Chowdhury, Shri Nirmal Chatterjee and myself received letters at Delhi from a Sanyasi, who sits in one of the burning ghats in Calcutta. He mentioned in his letter that every day at night he is watching the policemen coming between midnight and early mornings and burning bodies of young people, aged between 14 and 30. We have also received complaints from the near and dear ones of the police victims. They have complained that the police are

coming and threatening them against complaining and disclosing of anything to outsiders."

A Committee of enquiry set up under the auspices of the West Bengal Association of Democratic Lawyers after touring various districts in West Bengal states in a provisional report that in the villages the role of the police has been to serve as armed agents of the jotedars. The police everywhere help jotedars and their goondas to take away the lands distributed among the peasants and loot the paddy grown by them on such lands. They have also taken every step to break peasants' organisations.

A favourite method has been the imposition of curfew under the cover of which numerous police battalions conducted raids on houses. According to evidence, such police raids have become a regular feature in Kamarpara railway basti, Rajapur, Bagha Jatin, Santoshpur, Haltu, Garfa and Nellienagar areas of the Chittaranjan Colony.

Wherever the Committee went, it was told that the police and CRP always use filthy, unprintable abuses against persons whom they arrest, beat and torture. Men, young and old, clustered round the Committee members at Alipurduar and asked what they could do in the face of the filthy unprintable abuses that the CRP hurled against their wives and mothers in their presence whenever they came on their frequent rounds of search and raid.

The Committee lists, with details, the number of people killed, wounded or suspected to have been beaten to death in police lock-up outside Calcutta, of women raped, of the activities of anti-social elements in collusion with the police; and describes methods of torture. In some cases rods are thrust into the rectum, arms are violently twisted. The CRP and the police have also discovered another method of torture namely, a kind of screwing of the belly. In Durgapur, Sri Gopal Chatterjee deposed that after this method had been applied to him he began to bleed through his nose and mouth. According to his evidence he was continuously beaten

with a rod for about four hours. He was given water to drink and when he put his lips to it, it had been kicked off. Some ironplates were fixed on his shoulder and then a screw was applied as if to pierce through the plate. Sm Sumitra Bala De of Durgapur, aged about 75, deposed that she was thrown into the van after having been dragged along Asoke Avenue for about 20 yards. When she asked for water at the police station, a policeman whom she can identify offered her urine. She deposed that another young girl had been brought to the police station and the police attempted to outrage her modesty. Srimati De was arrested in a case of bomb throwing.

What is the size of the discretionary fund in the hands of the police administration ? A policeman told an angry mother that her son who had been beaten up in the police lock-up was lucky. Doesn't she know that if he had killed him he would have got Rs 500 and a promotion ?

December 12, 1970

WHAT HAPPENED AT MIDNAPUR ?

A CORRESPONDENT

What this writer has gathered about the recent killing of undertrial Naxalite prisoners in Midnapur Jail is most disturbing.

About 10 Naxalite prisoners were due to be released on that particular date. But the prisoners had come to know from some secret source that this was just a plan to trap them. The police were obliged under court orders to let them off. The prisoners heard that the police had laid the trap in the following manner : The prisoners would be let out of the jail, but police vans with strong reinforcements would be waiting for them at the gate. They would be at once rearrested and this

time detained under the PVA Act. Certainly some of them would try to escape and they would be instantly shot dead. This was the supposed plan the Naxalites had somehow got wind of.

Consequently, when in the morning the warders told the prisoners that they had been acquitted and were to leave the jail immediately, they flatly refused to do so on that day. The warders were confused and went back for the time. But the problem remained, for even after lunch the prisoners, anticipating the deadly trap, refused to leave. Then at about 4 p. m., a couple of warders went to the Naxalite cells and started to hurl filthy abuses at the prisoners who had refused to budge. The Naxalites provided characteristic rejoinders, and this sort of thing went on for several minutes. In the mean time, a large CRP and EFR force had been brought in and kept in readiness. Then a warder hit one of the Naxalites on the face with his fist. The inevitable followed. The Naxalites hurled themselves on the warders—but only for a few seconds. For the police and the EFR came rushing in and started shooting the Naxalites indiscriminately and then smashing the heads of the others with rifle butts. One of the informants heard the sound of the firing continuing intermittently for several minutes. The first police trap had failed ; but the second succeeded with vengeance.

Only a few months ago, an almost identical incident had taken place at the same venue. On that occasion the police had launched a brutal assault on the undertrial Naxalites in Midnapur Jail, seriously injuring scores of them on the plea that they had attacked Mr Deben Das, a CPI MLA, who had been visiting the prisoners. The number of the killed and the wounded had not been disclosed.

December 26, 1970

Comment

MURDERS IN MIDNAPUR

More than a week has passed without much being known of the circumstances in which eight prisoners of the Midnapur Central Jail were done in. The political parties are conniving with the Government at this conspiracy to blackout a massacre unparalleled even in British days, for they have lapsed into silence over the incident after a feeble formal protest. They are too engrossed in bracing themselves for a mid-term poll. In fact, they have converted the murders in Midnapur into another argument for an early poll.

Under the cover provided by the left parties the Government is, in the meantime, trying hard to water down the crime. The first reports stated that eight Naxalites in the jail had been killed in police firing. A revised version of the facts was issued the next day exonerating the police nd passing the responsibility for firing to the warders.

Obviously, the Government's intention is to make out a case that the firing was in self-defence and for saving the lives of some kidnapped warders. The Government story has a familiar ring ; such firings have often been resorted to by the police in Calcutta to save themselves from murderous assaults by unarmed arrested Naxalites when they were being taken to police stations.

Lest this old hat should not sell, the Government has carried the story further. Denying the earlier report, it has given out that only three had died of bullet wounds while five succumbed to injuries of other types. Simultaneously, it was found out that only three of the killed were Naxalites and the rest had been held for other offences. Few people believe in case histories as divulged by the police. After all that Government has said the fact remains that all those killed were from Gopiballavpur and at least half of the injured in

hospital are from that area. That the killed were from Gopiballavpur proves that they were Naxalites, whatever might have been the charges against them. Whether they were killed by the police or some hardened convicts appointed warders, they were victims of the Government's programme of extermination of the Naxalites.

December 26, 1970

Orissa

IT'S NOT TOO LATE

PRAFULLA KUMAR SENAPATY

In the first week of December, the verdict of death passed by the Sessions court in Andhra on N. B. Pattanaik, the veteran CPI (ML) leader of Orissa, and three other peasant guerillas created a stir in the sensitive minds of some intellectuals, poets, social workers, advocates and students. Police victimisation and repression is now not merely confined to the communist activists but has even affected innocent citizens. At the slightest, unfounded suspicion of the police the adivasis of Koraput, a CPI (ML) base, and of Nilgiri, a CPM base, are subjected to inhuman torture. Capture of the innocent adivasis, then death by shooting, is the normal ethics now operating there. One such instance was the murder of Gambhir Bhuyan at the hands of the police in Koraput in 1970. It was reported in Oriya newspapers, *Samaj* and *Prajatantra*, that he died in an encounter. But the truth as unmasked by a PSP MLA, Mr Biraja Roy, who visited Mr Bhuyan's home, interviewed his wife and other people of the locality, was that Mr Bhuyan's case was one of cold-blooded murder by the police on suspicion of his collusion with the Marxist-Leninists. Roy also stated that rape of adivasi women, and plundering adivasis' property

have become the acquired, accepted and legitimate right of the police.

Mrs Gandhi has to secure bank nationalisation with the consent and the appeasement of the bankers and pay heavy compensation to them and the neo-rulers, because of the "fundamental" right to property. But the same fundamental right (the right to property) takes on altogether a different dimension in the case of the adivasis of Koraput when a goat or a hen of those wretched of the earth, acquired after years' toil, is pillaged to feed pot-bellied police officers.

These indeed, should prompt us to shake off our old style of thinking and make us adopt a new perspective to assess the situation. It is good news that some enlightened people of Orissa, pre-eminent among them, the ex-Chief Minister, Mr Nabakrushna Choudhury, have woken up to the urgency of the situation and formed a Civil Rights Defence Committee with Prabir Palit, an advocate of Orissa High Court, as its convenor. The Committee, composed of the Sarvodaya leader, Sm Malati Choudhury, the Marxist poet Rabindranath Singh, the CPI leader Gobindo Mohanty, the CPM leader, Laxmana Pattanaik the advocate, Aswini Jena, Haridas Chakravarty, Rabindranath Sahoo and many others will take measures, legal and otherwise, to see that the death sentence on N. B. Pattanaik and others is commuted, that Manmohan Misra, the labour leader arrested in Simdega, is released from jail and the cool, calculated police hunt for heads, so systematically planned out, is exposed ruthlessly.

January 16, 1971

Letter

POLICE TRICKS

Believe it or not, the fascist Punjab police have got printed some 5000 copies of a CPI(ML) organ *Lok Yudh* (The People's War) of Ludhiana. They have badly failed to trace out the guerillas and their hideouts. So they are troubling and torturing innocent people by planting literature and weapons on them. In a vain attempt to fool and misguide the people about the Naxalite movement, they are committing dacoities and thefts and labelling them Naxalite activities.

RANA PRIT
Bhatinda

February 13, 1971

West Bengal

DANSE MACABRE

SUMANTA BANERJEE

The political drama on the West Bengal stage is being relegated to the background by a sort of danse macabre. The question of seizure of power, whether by competing with rivals for parliamentary majority, or by launching a guerilla warfare, is drowned in an orgy of meaningless murders.

The participants in the orgy are a motley crowd of political and non-political elements, police and lumpen-proletariat masquerading as CPI(M) or CPI(ML) supporters, whatever affiliation suits them according to convenience. The net result is a gradual and calculated elimination of some of the best and most dedicated active cadre of the CPI(M), CPI(ML) and other Leftist parties.

The impending elections have lent a sense of urgency to this task of elimination, each participant having a different

motive. The CPI(M) is eager to clean its strongholds of Naxalite elements to prevent disruption and ensure smooth sailing for its candidates ; the CPI(ML) is naturally retaliating, but it is also interested in allowing an atmosphere of terror to prevail to prevent the holding of elections or at least to ensure poor polling to claim later that the people had responded to their call for boycotting the elections. Taking advantage of the mutual hostilities, the police are busy finishing off the active cadre of both the parties by organizing anonymous assassinations in a bid to put the blame on either of the two parties. The anti-social scum of Calcutta have found an opportunity to settle their old scores and are contributing their bit to the bloody mosaic of dead bodies and mangled limbs.

Perhaps an amount of blood-letting was inevitable in West Bengal. A purging of the bottled-up rancour, accumulating since the fall of the last United Front Government, was necessary. But the targets are misplaced ; the wrong people are getting killed while the real culprits are getting away with it.

The dissipation of militancy in mutual hostilities leading to the large-scale loss of ranks of both the parties could have been avoided, since although fundamental policy differences kept the CPI(M) and CPI(ML) apart, the general activities of both the parties during the last two or three years were serving a common interest—radicalization of the political atmosphere of West Bengal. Whatever basic contradictions there might remain in their policies, their actions appeared to be complementary, helping each other indirectly of course, to create objective conditions for a more revolutionary situation in the future.

In spite of basic differences between the two parties, their lapses have a common character. The CPI(M) proclaims that it thinks in terms of forming governments in States where it is strong, precipitating confrontation with the Centre, exposing the limitations of the Constitution and launching mass movements to seize power. The last stage of the programme has

never been spelt out in concrete terms and a tendency to depend on spontaneity in some distant future is evident.

The CPI(ML) on the other hand believes in working outside the parliamentary framework, its main forms of operation being annihilation of jotedars, moneylenders and businessmen in villages and cities, undermining the faith of the people in administration and police, a mini-cultural revolution by attacks on schools, colleges, examinations, statues of national leaders and other symbols of culture of the ruling class and arming the peasantry to create a liberation army. It hopes that the proletariat of the city will join the peasants in the final stage to seize power. Here again, the last stage is kept veiled in ambiguous terminology. There seems to be a naive belief in the spontaneous uprising of the people and a lack of understanding of the calculated counter-strategy of a better prepared army of the State.

The present leaders of both the parties thus have one thing in common—a tendency to depend on the automatic course of a movement, a certain amount of "tailism" that has been plaguing the Indian communist leadership for the last few decades.

The pathetic role of the CPI(M) during the strike in Durgapur last year is a concrete instance of this tendency. Obviously the leaders hoped that the Centre would cow down in the face of a threat of continuous strike. They sought to bolster it up by issuing now and then calls for general strike. The Secretary of the Party's West Bengal unit, Mr Promode Das Gupta, even went to the extent of promising the people a "blood bath" in the State if the Centre did not agree to accept the demands. The twin belief in the vulnerability of the Centre and the spontaneity of the masses spelt the debacle of the Party, which had to withdraw the strike in the face of massive retaliatory measures by the Centre. The leadership's complaint later that it did not apprehend the severe police retaliation, speaks poor of their political foresight.

The naive optimism of the CPI(M) leadership is paralleled

by the wishful thinking of the CPI(ML) leaders. In its eagerness to claim every murder as a triumph of its policies, the CPI(ML) has failed to dissociate itself from murders committed perhaps by the police or anti-social elements. The readiness with which the party leaders hailed the sporadic attacks on statues and examinations is another instance. They admitted : 'Instead of awaiting the directives of the centre, the youth and students of the party started this movement in accordance with the central political situation and the popular mood'...["In Defence Of Breaking Statues"—North Eastern Calcutta Local Committee of the CPI(ML)]. This kind of emphasis on spontaneity has led to a situation where even common murders and petty burglaries pass off as Naxalite activities.

Yet, to some extent both the parties have succeeded in furthering the process of radicalization of politics in West Bengal. The CPI(M) contributed to this by trying to infiltrate its own men into the administration and the police during the UF regime. Both these pillars became emasculated as a result of the divided loyalties that followed the CPI(M) efforts. While the common people's loss of faith in the bureaucracy was complete, the active cadre of the CPI(ML) took advantage of this by extending their base of operations.

In the countryside, the Naxalbari uprising in 1967, led by the present leaders of the CPI(ML) who were then still in the CPI(M), had its impact on the policies of the Marxist leaders when they came to power again in 1969. They tried to distribute land among the landless and roused in the process the hitherto dormant militancy among the peasantry. The success with which the landlords could frustrate the effort at land distribution by getting injunctions from courts furthered the process of disenchantment of the peasantry with the social system. Along with this the systematic annihilation of jotedars in some areas by the Naxalites sharpened their militant mood.

In the industrial sector, restoration and protection of trade union rights of the workers by the United Front Government

led in some cases to manifestations of militancy prompting a capital strike in the form of closure of factories and refusal by industrialists to invest in West Bengal, leading to the present economic crisis. The swelling of the ranks of unemployed workers and the realization among them that pro-labour reforms within the present structure can hardly succeed, might create conditions among the workers for more radical forms of Leftism like Naxalite activities.

Thus, the measures taken by the CPI(M) while in power willy nilly helped the CPI(ML).

West Bengal today is poised for the next act of the drama. The CPI(M) is the most organised among the parliamentary Leftist parties with a wide mass base. It is likely to come to power as a dominant partner of a united front. The ranks of the party before the announcement of the elections were in the grip of uncertainty. The leadership, particularly after the defeat in the Kerala elections and the failure in Durgapur, had little to offer the ranks by way of a programme. The only political activities in the State since the promulgation of Presidential rule were the actions of the CPI(ML). If this state of affairs continued for some time more, the CPI(M) would have had to face a large-scale erosion in its ranks. The announcement of the elections has therefore come as a boon to the party leaders helping them to keep the ranks engaged.

But the main problem will have to be faced by the Marxist leaders after the elections. If they can form a government, the chronic problems of the State will loom large before them awaiting a solution. Judging from past experience, efforts at carrying out the unfinished reform programmes of the past like redistribution of land or improving labour relations in the industry would again face the old in-built obstacles in the present social order. The police might be utilized to finish off the Naxalites, but can hardly be relied upon as loyal minions. Their shifting of loyalties immediately after the dismissal of the UF Government should be a warning for the CPI (M).

It is likely that the Marxists after coming to power will try to take a more belligerent attitude towards the Centre and movements might follow on demands for more powers to the State. But it is doubtful whether the CPI (M) would translate into practical action its demand for West Bengal's share of 75% of the taxes collected by the Centre from the State. Would it dare to confiscate the amount ? Is it prepared for the next course if the Centre retaliates ?

Apparently the CPI(M) leadership, true to its habit of leaving everything to spontaneity, has not bothered to answer these questions. The results would be an escalation in the expectations of the people followed by frustration of their hopes. This would create fresh openings for the extension of Naxalite footholds among the people.

Although the CPI (M) professes to expose the hollowness of the Constitution and prepare the masses for its complete overhauling and ultimate seizure of power, the party's decision to run governments within the present constitutional framework has made it embody some new status quo supported by those very forces—the police and the bureaucracy—which the CPI (ML) seeks to destroy.

One is not sure how long these experiments with united front governments will continue in West Bengal. But it is clear that if the CPI(M) is serious about living up to its pledges of seizing power through mass movements, it will be forced soon by circumstances in the State to resort to more militant and violent actions. It is yet to be seen however whether its supporters in the bases are prepared only to vote for the party or take up arms in its defence.

In the meantime, a civil war-type situation is likely to prevail in West Bengal. Shifting loyalties or defections as they are more commonly known today, are no longer confined to the floors of the legislature. The administration, police, industrialists and every other powerful stratum of the population are involved in the game. These elements lend their backing to political forces irrespective of colour, to safeguard

their own interests. Cases of donations to the funds of one Leftist party by industrialists to prevent labour trouble or keep other rival parties away are not unknown in West Bengal. Spheres of influence in the cities are being demarcated by each party. With the loss of faith in civil administration, the citizens are likely to seek protection of either of these parties. They are awaiting the emergence from these inter-party clashes of that decisive political force which will shape West Bengal's destiny.

February 13, 1971

Bihar

NAXALITES IN CHOTANAGPUR

N. K. SINGH

Naxalites are not a new phenomenon for Chotanagpur. Their presence could be traced to the militant adivasi movement of 1968. It is said that they were the real force behind it and it was they who had formed a popular mass organisation viz. Birsa Seva Dal, to infiltrate into the tribals. A good number of supporters and sympathisers of the Naxalites were in the leading bodies of the B.S.D., which gave the call of election boycott during the mid-term poll of 1969. Massive armed demonstrations were organised by the B.S.D., whose leaders, under Naxalite influence, had adopted the method of underground functioning. The Naxalites too characterised the B.S.D. as a progressive national organisation—without considering the class character of its leadership.

Later on, the Naxalites had to confess that their strategy in dealing with the adivasi movement was wrong. The first Bihar State Conference of the CPI(ML) reported : "It was wrong for the district leadership of Ranchi and also the State

leadership to set up Birsa Seva Dal as a nationality mass organisation and expect it to initiate and lead anti-feudal and anti-State struggle. Behind this erroneous line was the wrong concept that the problem of emancipation of adivasi people from non-adivasi exploiters and the problem of emancipation of the adivasi peasantry from landlords and moneylenders were separate problems."

After the adivasi struggle, two successive years have passed during which many a new development took place. The CPI-(ML) was formed, and it switched over from crop-cutting movements to the annihilation movement. Naxalites working in Chotanagpur have the same *modus operandi* as elsewhere in the country. Here, they are particularly active in Ranchi and Singhbhum districts. Areas bordering Orissa and West Bengal are a natural breeding ground for Naxalite violence. Besides adivasi peasants, they are said to have a good hold among the working class of the steel city of Jamshedpur.

At the time of writing, the Naxalites have killed at least 26 of their class-enemies in the region. The list includes zamindars, moneylenders, rural kulaks, police informers, businessmen and those who serve as the law and order arm of the Government. Besides this, raids in peculiar Naxalite fashion have been conducted on many educational institutions, Government offices and properties etc. in various towns of the region. Instances of attack on police pickets and individual policemen have also been reported.

The hills of Chotanagpur drew the attention of the whole nation in May, 1970, when 54 men were arrested by the Bihar police after an extensive operation in the jungles of Jaduguda. The massive operation in which about 500 policemen participated with the help of helicopters to comb the entire forest resulted in a rewarding catch after six full days : 54 persons, almost all of them Bengalis between 16 and 26 years of age, along with large quantities of arms and ammunition. But the entire thing became more sensational and caught the headlines of the dailies particularly due to the presence of a 26-year old

British blonde, Miss Mary Tyler. The incident created quite a sensation at the time.

The arrested members are said to strongly believe in the "man, money and gun" (MMG) principle. They however claim to be true followers of Mao. Admitting the total failure of their mission, Mr Subroto Roy, the leader of the group, said that it was mainly because of the lack of adequate knowledge of topography of the area and physical inability of his team to negotiate the rugged terrain of forests and hills. The fact is they failed because of their wrong notion of "revolution without three Ps" (party, politics and people).

Jamshedpur, a very important industrial town, is called the "little Calcutta" of Bihar in view of the growing Naxalite activities in the town. It has become the most disturbed town in the State. Not a day passes without the news of some Naxalite 'action' in some part of the town. Bomb explosions, murders, raids on educational institutions and government concerns have become a regular feature.

The credit—or blame—for all this goes to the Naxalite organisation among the working class of the town ; Jamshedpur is being claimed as the only town (barring Calcutta) where the Naxalites have some base among the working class. The militant mood of the workers was revealed in a strike in 1970, which developed from an economic into a political struggle. Here it will not be out of place to point out that Mr S. N. Singh, a veteran Naxalite leader of Bihar, has worked for a long time in Jamshedpur trade unions. The CPM-controlled trade unions have lost much owing to the exit of Mr Singh from the party.

The recent growth of Naxalite activities in Jamshedpur is attributed to the 'import' of many hard-core Naxalites from Bengal, particularly from the Midnapore area. Till now, Naxalites have murdered at least eight men in "little Calcutta" besides injuring many. Educational institutions, Government offices and properties, police pickets etc. have been attacked many times.

The first ever murder to be committed by the Naxalites in Jamshedpur town was that of a member of the Tata Town Seeurity Department—an alleged police informer—on September 20, 1970. Previously bombs were hurled in one of the rooms of TISCO Dog Squad, owing to which one guard was seriously injured. In October, a TELCO worker, said to be a CPI-supporter, and in November, a TISCO security guard were stabbed to death. Next month, a TELCO employee met the same fate and a TISCO security guard sustained bomb injuries when the Naxalites attacked a local higher secondary school. Later, he succumbed to his injuries in the hospital. After a few days a wealthy businessman too was done to death. Besides this, many persons, including police officials, have been injured following attacks by alleged Naxalites.

The first attack on educational institutions in Jamshedpur took place on August 1, 1970. Thereafter various secondary and higher secondary schools in the town were raided more than eleven times. It becomes clear from the arrests made by the police in this connection that the school-boys themselves are implicated in such 'actions'. And the students never protest against these 'actions', they rather sometimes favour them indirectly. The students of a TISCO-managed higher secondary school—said to be the main centre of Naxalite activities in the town—went on strike in protest against the arrest of one of their colleagues in connection with a raid on the school.

Besides raiding clubs and bars, which are the main meeting centres of the bourgeoisie, the Naxalites have attacked Government offices, such as the office of the Labour Commissioner. The local Gandhi Peace Foundation Building was raided two times. On August 13, 1970, on the eve of independence day, Naxalites tried (unsuccessfully) to blow up the 12-feet bronze statue of Jamshedjee Tata, erected in a local park. In January 1971, four buses belonging to the State Transport Corporation were burnt by the urban guerillas—all within a week's time. In the same month the Naxalites made their biggest sweep ;

a Pushpak aircraft belonging to the Jamshedpur Flying Club was bombed and burnt to ashes. (A rehearsal for blowing up of Jumbo jets ?)

Jamshedpur is the only town in Bihar where Naxalites are launching attacks on police officers. Besides three or four bomb-exploding attacks on patrol parties, there have been some unsuccessful attempts to kill individual police officers.

As a result, 200 alleged Naxalites have been arrested in Jamshedpur town alone. But they are not silent even inside jails. Four walls do not make a prison. In November 1970, a peculiar situation arose when more than four hundred prisoners stayed on the roof of Jamshedpur sub-jail for nearly 13 days following a clash between the warders and the prisoners. They stayed there despite every attempt (even bursting of tear gas-shells) on the part of the authorities to bring them down. They came down only after their demands were fulfilled. But the important part of the story is yet to be told—this struggle was fought under a red banner, which flew over the top of Jamshedpur sub-jail !

In view of growing Naxalite activities, the new SVD Government headed by Mr Karpoori Thakur has decided to strengthen the police administration in the steel city. A special budget of Rs. 5 lakhs has been sanctioned for this purpose under which three new police stations are to be set up besides strengthening the existing four with mobile wireless sets. At present, three-fourths of the police machinery are engaged in tackling the Naxalites and only one-fourth is left to look after routine jobs. As the SP of Jamshedpur admitted recently, the Naxalites have posed a big problem for the police force.

The police are not satisfied with the 205 arrests it has made and a special combing operation jointly undertaken by the local and Central Reserve Police has been launched. Over four hundred houses in different parts of the town were 'searched'. The outlets of the town have been sealed and all the trains passing through Tatanagar railway station are being

thoroughly watched. As a consequence, few more young men have been arrested and a police inspector engaged in the combing operation was shot at.

The Jana Sangh also has come forward to fight the Naxalite 'menace' in the steel city. Two or three processions have been brought out by the party which concluded with burning the effigy of Mao Tse-tung. In reaction, two of its workers were stabbed by suspected Naxalites.

In the rural areas of Singhbhum, the Naxalites are particularly active in the region bordering Gopiballavpur of West Bengal. At least ten persons, mostly zamindars and money-lenders, have been killed by them. The Naxalite violence has resulted in the posting of two companies of Bihar Military Police all through the areas bordering West Bengal.

Chaibasa, the district headquarters of Singhbhum, has never witnessed any violence on the part of the Naxalites. However, the police found some Naxalite elements in this silent town when they raided the hostel of a local college and seized "Mao literature, posters, Mao thoughts and teachings."

More or less, the same is the case with Ghatshila, where a higher secondary school was raided in the peculiar Naxalite fashion in August, 1970. No untoward incident has been reported.

In the rural areas of Singhbhum, besides killing ten, the Naxalites attacked the house of a police sub-inspector in Kharswan, 20 miles from Chaibasa, in September 1970. Bombs were also hurled at the house of a mine manager, in the same locality.

After Singhbhum, Ranchi is the second biggest centre of Naxalite activities in Chotanagpur. There are four main areas where they are active : Kolebira in Simdega subdivision, bordering Orissa; Mandar, Burmu and Khelari on the Palamau-Hazaribagh border ; Silli on the Ranchi-Purulia Road and Ranchi town itself. In rural areas, the Naxalites have 'annihilated' eight class enemies.

So far as Ranchi town is concerned, besides extensive wall painting, the Naxalites have confined themselves to throwing bombs and crackers. The first ever attack to be made by the

Naxalites in Ranchi town was on September 1, 1970, when a few crackers were hurled at the local Jana Sangh office. The Jana Sangh represents the Ranchi seat in the Bihar Assembly. Thereafter the local branch of the British Council Library and a bar were raided in typical Naxalite fashion.

In Dhanbad district, the Naxalite elements seem to be active among the student community mainly. In the Bihar Institute of Technology (Sindri) many movements—said to be inspired by Naxalite students—have been organised. The students of Jharia took out a procession to protest against the police firing in Calcutta University in September 1970. The processionists, who were in an angry mood, clashed with the police.

In November, a statue of Mahatma Gandhi was demolished in Dhanbad town. Next month, a much bigger action was conducted. Six armed young men raided the microwave relay station situated on a 500-feet high hillock on the outskirts of Dhanbad town and tried to damage the equipment. However, the plan was foiled by the police, which arrived on the spot and arrested one man. In January, the Registry office of Dhanbad was set afire. In the same month the office of the Life Insurance Corporation was raided at Sindri.

The Naxalites have been communicating 'death sentences' too. One such sentence was communicated to the Regional Labour Commissioner (Central) posted at Dhanbad. He was charged by the "people's court" with "anti-people activities." Following it the police took all precautions to protect his life.

Naxalites have been active in rural areas around Sindri. Besides threatening several rural kulaks, one village temple and the houses of two zamindars were burnt.

The other two districts of Chotanagpur—Santhal Parganas and Hazaribagh—are not yet on the Naxalite map. In both the districts a few suspected Naxalites have been arrested. However, one incident has been noted in Santhal Parganas. In August 1970, bombs were thrown on the house of the officer in-charge of Madhupur thana.

February 27, 1971

Andhra Pradesh

WILL YOU VOTE ?

C. K. KUTUMBA REDDY

It is high time for the voter to decide to boycott elections and support people's struggles surging forward on the lines of armed revolution.

I confine myself to the situation in Andhra Pradesh. In this State, according to available information, not less than 150 revolutionaries were shot dead by the police during 1969-70. The Andhra Police Minister, Mr J. Vengal Rao, speaking in the State Legislative Council on December 10, 1970, admitted that 110 "Naxalites" were shot dead by the police in "armed encounters". The phrase 'armed encounter' is a cloak the ministers and bureaucrats use to cover police atrocities.

In Srikakulam district alone the police have shot dead 140 revolutionaries. In Khammam district along with Battula Venkateswara Rao, two others were shot dead ; in West Godavari one, in Krishna district three, four in Guntur district, and one each in Ongole and Anantapur districts.

Battula Venkateswara Rao, Suryanarayana and Venkanna, belonging to the Revolutionary Communist Committee headed by T. Nagi Reddy were captured near Gondigudem in Khammam district, tortured by the police for two days, taken to the hillocks near Aswaraopet in an unconscious state and shot dead.

Panchadri Krishnamoorty, a top leader of CP(ML) and six others were apprehended while they were alighting from the train at Sompet and were taken to a nearby forest on the same night. In that forest they were shot dead.

Tamada Ganapati, Dr Bhaskar Rao and two others were arrested in a village near Amadalavalasa in Srikakulam district and were confined in the Amadalavalasa police lock-up for

two days, tortured there, taken to the hills near Tekkali and shot dead.

Srimati Panchadri Nirmala (wife of Mr Panchadri Krishnamoorty), Srimati Saraswati and Srimati Ankamma were arrested in Berhampur ; Mr Panigrahi, S. R., a famous revolutionary poet, was also apprehended along with them. They were kept in various police stations in Sompet taluk. The hired police goons beat them into pulp. Later, all of them were killed by the police gangsters.

Veeranki Rajagopal (Eluru), Dasari Venkataramana (Vijayawada) and B. Janakiramaraju (Kapileswarapuram) of the CP(ML) were arrested near Samalkot in East Godavari district. Rajagopal was taken to the East Godavari Agency area and there the police killed him. The other two were taken to Mangipudi near Machilipatnam and there the police C.I.D. inspector, Pilla Satyanarayana, shot them dead. Before shooting them the two were kept in Nuzveed, Veeravalli and Kodal police stations for a month and tortured. Similarly B. Ramulu, a teacher belonging to Nulakaluru in Guntur district, Dasari Koteswara Rao belonging to Golantla in the same district and two others were taken to Nallamala forest and shot dead. Mr Bali Reddy of Gudluru in Kandukuru taluk of Ongole district was arrested on the night of 20 July, 1970, at Kanigiri town. He was taken to Munnangidinae forest and killed on the 24th morning.

There are now more than 2500 revolutionaries in jails on various charges framed up by the police. The Visakhapatnam, Rajahmundry and Warangal Central Jails and the Secunderabad district jail are filled with revolutionaries. They are lodged in various sub-jails too. A majority of them were not produced before any magistrate in the stipulated period of 24 hours by the police. Article 22 (2) of the Indian Constitution says that no arrested person could be kept under police custody for more than 24 hours and he should be produced before a magistrate within the prescribed period. The police have completely violated this. They were kept in various

police camps for months together and tortured brutally. The police have beaten all the past records of the world in proving their own brutal nature. In this regard information is also gathered from reliable sources and in certain cases from the very persons who have experienced the police brutality.

In the first instance, the reactionary government resorted to a swoop on the Revolutionary Communists in the State in July, 1969. Arrests were made on a mass scale on the night of July 26. But the High Court ordered the release of many, including its top leader, Mr T. Nagi Reddy, on their writ petitions. Hence the government's conspiracy—to frame conspiracy cases against the rank and file of the Revolutionary Communist Committee. After arresting Mr Nagi Reddy and others in Madras on December 18, 1970, Revolutionary Communists were arrested all over the State.

Mr V. Ramalingachary, a provincial member of the A. P. Revolutionary Communist Committee and former Secretary of the Srikakulam district committee, was arrested in Kakinada village in the Agency area of East Godavari district. Along with him Apparao Reddy (Visakhapatnam), Bhaskar Rao, a polytechnic student, and Bose, a medico, were arrested on September 7, 1969. Till September 22, they were kept in Donkarayi, Salem and Sabbavaram police stations. On the 16th and 17th of that month they were confined in a forest travellers' bungalow near Donkarayi and brutally beaten. Pins were pressed into their nails. Their hands were scratched with glass pieces. But the police announced that they had been arrested on September 23, when they were produced before a magistrate.

The police did not exclude even priests in temples. They spread their "dragnet" to apprehend one T. Jogiraju of Neharbara Temple at Kakinada. Our intelligent police officers raided Vigneswara Temple near Achutapuram gate in the same town on the night of September 16, 1970, and caught hold of its "Archaka", Bucchi Sanyasiraju. The police told him that he was wanted by the DSP to perform some "Puja"

in his house. On this pretext he was taken to the police lock-up and tortured to vomit all that he knew about "Naxalites". Later the police came to know that he was not the priest wanted. Meanwhile some of the devotees of the Vigneswara Temple came to know about this and intervened to get the poor priest released.

Andhra Pradesh has become a scene of foisted conspiracy cases. Apart from the two major conspiracy cases, one against Mr Nagi Reddy and others at Hyderabad, and the other against CP (ML) cadres known as Parvatipuram Conspiracy Case, a number of conspiracy cases have started in many districts. There are the East Godavari District Conspiracy Case, Tallapalem and Kodavaluru Conspiracy Case in Nellore district, Kurnool Conspiracy Case, Kazipet Conspiracy Case in Cuddapah district, Timmapuram Conspiracy Case in Nalgonda district and City Conspiracy Case in Hyderabad, on record at present.

Quite a number of medical and engineering students, advocates, journalists and several other highly educated persons are falsely implicated in these cases. Several educated women also have been dragged into these fictitious cases.

The degree of repression in the Agency areas of Srikakulam and Telengana areas is immeasurable. In the Srikakulam district seven taluks out of eleven are declared as "disturbed areas". In the Telengana area Mulugu, Narasampet and Parakal in Warangal district, Illendu, Burgumpahad and Bhadrachalem in Khammam district, Mantalna in Karimnagar district are "disturbed areas". Everyday a number of new police camps with CRP men are being set up. There are 11 police camps in Mantalna taluk ; in Iylapuram and Bandala villages in Mulug taluk, in Kottagudem in Narasampet taluk and in Koyagudem and Kasinepalli in Illendu taluk new police camps have sprouted up.

Police raids on villages in forest areas are a daily feature. Every time the police raid a village, all the people in the village are assembled in a particular place and all people irrespectively

beaten. The chickens, the grain and the little provisions the Girijans have are forcibly taken away. The dusk-to-dawn curfew has been in vogue in those areas since several months. The government has opened a number of concentration camps on the model of Vietnamese "strategic hamlets". On 22 November 1970, UNI in a despatch stated :

"250 Girijan families consisting of 600 members were evacuated from their villages and were settled in Ramabhadrapuram, Jammivalasa and Peddabalibanda villages...The government took this measure to wean away the Girijans from the Naxalite influence."

The government is not only using its "iron hand" on revolutionary movements and other mass movements, but is also ruthlessly curbing the movements of government workers. The government is running amuck and throwing its own employees behind bars.

M. B. Krishnamma, President of the State Elementary School Teachers' Federation, was arrested in 1969 and is still kept in dark dungeons. P. N. Bhushanam, Secretary, Srikakulam District Elementary School Teachers' Federation, was first detained in 1969 and later was implicated in the Parvatipuram Conspiracy Case. The same is the fate of Chowdary Balaji, a clerk in the Shermahammadpur Panchayat Samiti Offlice. Dongaiah, a lecturer in Srikakulam district, was shot dead by the police. V. Syamsunder Rao, Secretary, District NGO's Association, Kakinada, was arrested and implicated in criminal cases. Prasad and Yugandhar, two railway employees and a health inspector, P. V. Subbarao and Sarabandhi, a Basic Health worker, were arrested in connection with the Prodduvaka murder case. Bikkiramulu, a teacher, who was a native of Mulakaluru village in Guntur district, was brutally shot dead by the police. Pandi Venkaiah a postal employee in Guntur in Nellore district, was arrested and tortured for 3 months in police custody. Later, he was implicated in the Kodavaluru Conspiracy Case. Miss Rajeswari, who is an accountant of the Reserve Bank at Nellore, was arrested on

the ground that she was harbouring "Naxalites" and kept in police custody for over a month and tortured. Now she is confined in Central Jail, Rajahmundry, as a detenu.

Most of the accused implicated in the City Conspiracy Case Hyderabad, are government employees : Baburao is a railway guard at Donakell, Samuel, an employee of AG's office, L. V. Subbaiah, an employee in HMT.

Janasakti, the offlcial organ of the "Revolutionary Communist Committee", was not spared by this pseudo-democratic government. The police raided the *Janasakti* office on the midnight of July 26, 1969 and arrested D. Krishnamoorty, who was looking after the organ. Sub-editor, N. Venkata Rao and managerial clerk K. Satyanarayana were also arrested. The government has not banned *Janasakti*, but the police officers who raided the *Janasakti* office carried away all the office records, files and all other equipment with them.

It is no exaggeration to say that the jails in our state are hell on earth. Proper food is not given, no amenities are provided, no medical attention is paid. More than 45 revolutionaries died in jail during 1969-70 owing to lack of proper food and medical attention. More than 5 undertrial prisoners are confined in a cell which is actually intended for one. Bugs, mosquitoes and scorpions are co-dwellers. No doubt these are affectionately fostered by the department to suck the blood of the revolutionaries.

In Chittoor sub-jail a startling incident took place. Narayana Reddy, a revolutionary undertrial, was shot dead inside the jail. The police version is that the undertrials attacked the jail authorities with sticks and they had to open fire. From where can the undertrials get sticks when even a razor blade is not allowed inside ?

In these circumstances it is up to the elector to decide whether he will vote in the coming elections.

February 27, 1971

Tripura

THE NAXALITE CHALLENGE

A CORRESPONDENT

The CPI (ML)'s appearance nearly two years ago was greeted by the political pundits with derision, while some other anti-Naxalite forces pretended not to recognise it as a political force. But soon the CPI (ML) started penetrating into the interior of the State in the face of heavy odds peculiar to Tripura. It must be said to the credit of the CPI (ML) cadres that when it was so difficult to activise both the tribal and non-tribal peasants on the basis of a common programme, they were able to gain their confidence.

The tribal peasants rose in revolt at Maharani, a village under Udaipur sub-divison, in December, 1969 and killed Elfus, the most notorious tribal jotedar of the locality. This action on the part of the peasant guerillas organized by the CPI (ML) was considered by it as a major breakthrough in the history of the peasant movement in Tripura since 1950.

Immediately after this incident the Government of Tripura sent police and CRP forces to Maharani with permission to go on a spree of killing and torturing the starving peasants. But the fact remains that the police and CRP forces have hardly been able to put down the movement and prevent the poor peasants from rising in revolt elsewhere in Tripura. The Maharani incident rather accelerated the process of activising the peasants against the new feudal lords and their lackeys.

The CPI(ML) has drawn most of its activists from among the students. With this the general trend of student activism can be said to have radically changed. Student activism which was so long confined to conducting and contesting college elections under different party banners in isolation from the masses has now been canalised into a positive direction. This

new development on the student front has baffled the Government of Tripura.

If there is now anything left for the Government of Tripura to bother about, it is the growing CPI (ML) activities of the State. So it has unleashed massive repression on the Naxalites. Many have already been arrested, tortured and maimed inside police lock-ups. They are rotting in jails with no near possibility of ever being brought to courts for trial. The prominent among them are being slowpoisoned to death behind bars. The search for Maoist literature is going on in full swing and almost every day scores of houses are being raided by the police. But very little of all that is happening comes to light, because there is a conspiracy of silence on the part of the local press, a section of which claims itself to be 'progressive'.

The Government is very carefully seeing to it that every news about the Naxalites is suppressed.

March 6, 1971

Comment

BERHAMPUR JAIL KILLING

A CORRESPONDENT

Very few of the real facts regarding the killing of Naxalite prisoners in Berhampur Central Jail on February 24 have come to light.

The information this writer gathered from the February 27 issue of the local weekly *Janamat*, from two civil inspectresses of the Central Jail, and from other sources indicates a clear resemblance between the latest happening and the two earlier massacres of Naxalite prisoners in Midnapur Central Jail. *Janamat* reports that after the head warder, Niranjan Karal, had

been stabbed and the alarm-bell had started ringing, between 200 and 250 warders, policemen and others hurled themselves on the prisoners and attacked them indiscriminately with bayonets, lathis and bamboo poles. Four of the prisoners were battered to death on the spot and three others died in hospital. Two more succumbed later. After the assault, 16 seriously injured prisoners were taken to hospitals ; according to unofficial sources, 13 others are also in hospital with serious injuries. Two civil inspectresses of the jail, Mrs Ipsita Gupta and Mrs Gouri Chatterjee, who visited this jail after the incident found the Naxalite ward spattered with blood, and examining the wounded in hospital, they found that the severe injuries they bore were in the head, face, the shoulders and the hands.

Karal, who was stabbed by a Naxalite from behind the bars of a cell, is already recovering. The other warder, Chhetrey, was only slightly hurt. Where then was the need of launching this brutal mass assault on the prisoners ? The suspicion of deliberate planning is deepened by another fact. It was reported in *The Statesman* of February 25 & 26 that 14 warders had been seriously wounded. Yet when the civil inspectresses and others visited the jail, they found only two injured warders and failed to trace the other 12 supposedly wounded ones. People would undoubtedly recall in this context the recent cold-blooded murder of five Naxalite youths in Beliaghata when the police tried to cloak the real nature of the incident by the fiction of a bomb attack, and of several policemen being seriously injured.

This writer has no idea of how the Midnapur citizens responded to the two killings of prisoners there. But during his two days' stay at Berhampur he saw a wave of fierce mass indignation sweeping the whole urban area. There were huge crowds all the time at the hospital gates and people were defying sec. 144 in a most reckless manner. At times, it seemed that direct clashes would take place between the military and the masses of the townspeople. Countless military

trucks with stenguns at the ready were patrolling the streets day and night.

Under orders from the West Bengal Government, relatives are not being allowed to meet the prisoners.

It appears from the impressions formed by the inspecting personnel and other groups including journalists that this head warder, Niranjan Karal, had made it a regular pastime to provoke the prisoners by frequently referring to Mao Tsetung, Charu Majumdar and the CPI(ML) in extremely abusive terms and that this was what finally infuriated the Naxalites on the day of the event.

March 6, 1971

THE HOUNDS OF WEST BENGAL

T. GOSWAMI

Last August Mrs Indira Gandhi promised the Rajya Sabha that the Naxalites would be "fought to the finish". A couple of months later the Naxalites were being dragged out of their homes and shot in cold blood. Others disappeared mysteriously.

A few days before Mrs Gandhi's promise to finish the Naxalites the new Police Commissioner of Calcutta was talking of evolving a "new strategy" to deal with the extremists. "For obvious reasons" he would not disclose what this new strategy was and newspapers dutifully reproducing the official police handouts made sure that it was never disclosed. Victims of the strategy could never testify. Witnesses could never whisper about it while millions of newspaper readers would know of the death of an "anti-social Naxalite" at the hands of the police while trying to hurl bombs. One of the first occasions when the new strategy was implemented coincided with Mrs Gandhi's fighting speech in the Rajya Sabha. On the morning of August

11, 1970, a group of plainclothes policemen went to Taltala in central Calcutta "to arrest a wanted man", the 20-year-old Kajal Banerjee. The police, according to press reports, faced a shower of brickbats and bombs and in the melee Kajal tried to take away the revolver of a constable who "managed to pick it up and fire at them as a result of which Kajal died." (*Hindusthan Standard*, August 12, 1970). But the local people heard only the revolver shots that killed Kajal. Newspapers were too shy to spell out in detail the "new strategy" but reports about the "guerilla police" left nobody in doubt as to what it was all about. A report from New Delhi in *The Statesman* (August 13, 1970) said that Mr B. B. Ghosh, Principal Adviser to the State Government, told the Union Home Ministry that "it was not always possible to satisfy the requirements of law courts" and pleaded "for giving the police a free hand". The green signal had in fact already been given. But to prepare public opinion for a reversal of priorities, for the restoration of, in the words of the Police Commissioner of Calcutta, "order and law" they unabashedly referred to the "success" in Andhra where hundreds of Naxalites including Krishnamoorty and Satyanarayana had been shot dead in cold blood after being captured. Naxalites cannot be punished by the court because, as police sources told *The Statesman*, (September 1970), evidence from the public has been singularly lacking...Unless the difficulty about securing evidence in court can be immediately overcome, the situation may deteriorate... "It is in this context that some police sources", the report said, "have started emphasizing the need for police being given a fairly free hand in dealing with Naxalites and, in this connexion, draw attention to what the police have done in States like Andhra Pradesh."

By the beginning of October, organization of murder squads, modelled almost on the notorious 'Ton Ton Macoute' assassination squads of the Haitian dictator, Papa Doc, was complete. Referring to the formation of what it called "guerilla police squads" a *Times of India* report (October 9, 1970) said

"the idea is to have small squads of five or six policemen operating on 'low-level intelligence' in the localities assigned to them. They will move about in plainclothes and be armed with pistols for use *in self defence*. The object of the guerilla squads will be to track down the wanted Naxalites in the streets" (emphasis added). Giving further details as to how the police would fire on Naxalites "in self defence" a *Times of India* correspondent had earlier reported (September 22, 1970) "what the police will have to do is to secure information about Naxalite dens, raid them, and *draw out* the trouble-makers in open clashes. In such clashes the superiority of arms will prevail ; so far the superiority of the police in this respect is beyond doubt. In a nutshell, the Government will have to *shoot its way out* of the present situation. According to the advocates of this method, the only way to put down the 'red terror' of the Naxalites is to respond to the situation with a superior 'white terror' " (emphasis added).

However, long before the murder squads in plainclothes were let loose in the streets of Calcutta, the police had tried simpler methods like torturing suspected prisoners to death. On August 19, Samir Bhattacharyya (18) was beaten to death in a North Calcutta police lock-up. Newspapers, responsible national dailies as they are, wouldn't go beyond calling this ghastly murder "a mysterious death". The Bengali-language weekly *Darpan*, however, published in gruesome detail how Samir was tortured to death, clearly identifying the murderers. In the face of public anger that burst into violence the Police Commissioner promised an enquiry. "The officials found guilty", he assured (if anybody was in need of his assurance), "would be punished." More than a month after the incident he admitted that Samir's death was "largely the result of an assault". But so used the people had become to cold-blooded murder by the forces of law and order that hardly anybody asked about the promised punishment. Since then a number of people have died in police custody—some while trying to "escape" some in an "attack of pneumonia" and for sundry

other "reasons". Some have been shot dead while "attacking" policemen in vans.

No wonder immediately after a youth is arrested, his parents would rush to the thana and plead with tears for his life. Some parents would even feel relieved if their ward was charged with specific offence and moved into jail from police lock-ups. But it did not take much time to turn this imaginary haven into hell. With a well-laid plan to kill important Naxalites, prison guards opened fire on unarmed prisoners.

When murder in lock-up was found inconvenient another method was discovered to eliminate the youth against whom no convincing case could be framed. Prisoners arrested in the morning or a day before would be killed in "gun-battle" with the police. Take, for instance, the murder of Buro Halder of Krishnagar. As *The Statesman* correspondent from Krishnagar reported (September 16, 1970) "during the combing operation a small police party headed by the former S. P., Mr A. Samanta, arrived near a jungle at Raipara. Suddenly from the jungle a volley of shots were fired at the police party. The policemen and officers took up positions, and returned the fire. The stillness of the night was broken with the reverberating sounds of gunfire". Later, police discovered the bullet-riddled body of Buro Halder. The next day the same paper briefly reported that the father of the deceased had alleged in petition to the District Magistrate that Buro had been arrested by the police at about 9-30 a.m. on September 15, on the night of which he was supposed to have been killed in gun battle. An inquiry was ordered but the mystery of unheard "reverberating sounds of gunfire" remains unresolved. Ten days later, the Raipara gun battle story was repeated in Bhabani Dutt Lane of central Calcutta. "At about 3-30 a.m....a party of detectives, guided by a suspected Naxalite, Anup Bose, who had earlier been arrested in the Medical College Hospital, had gone to raid a Naxalite hideout," said *The Statesman* (September 26) report. "Soon after the detectives entered the lane, they found about eight youths writing slogans and pasting posters on the wall.

When the party surrounded them they attacked the detectives with bombs and fired shots from two of their pipeguns. The detectives immediately fired from their revolvers and rifles... Meanwhile, Anup Bose seeing the police engaged in a pitched battle attempted to escape. He scrambled towards the youths but was caught in the police firing". Of the three youths killed along with Anup, one, Ajoy Sanyal, had been arrested on the same evening and the other two dragged out of their homes to be shot in the street. Ajoy's father appealed to the Governor for an inquiry into his death, as usual, to no avail.

But the police were not as bloody-minded as people thought them to be from the shooting spree. If only New Delhi would arm them with a Preventive Detention Act they would be operating within the bounds of law. The then Union Minister for Home, Mr K. C. Pant told reporters on September 18, that the State Government spokesman had argued for the revival of preventive detention so that it could deal with Naxalites and anti-socials "effectively and in a more humane manner". Strangely, while the Government appeared to be very keen to give up inhuman methods once it was armed with P.D., a high police official confided to a reporter that "reintroduction of the P.D. Act would be of little avail at this stage to bottle up the extremists" (*Hindusthan Standard*, September 22, 1970). What method would actually be of avail "at this stage" was left unmentioned. But the decision not to hold executive inquiries into police firings for at least three months—a decision that was taken in October—left nobody in doubt as to the method the police put its premium on.

On October 28, a party of plainclothes policemen sneaked into a musical soiree and shot Biren Debnath who was sitting among the audience and, in front of a panicked, fleeing audience, dragged him by his leg into a waiting van. The police version dutifully spoke of an attempt by Biren to snatch the revolver from one of the policemen and the police firing in self-defence. A statement issued on behalf of the Convention in Defence of Democratic Rights and Security said : "We came

across the unanimous evidence of quite a large number of persons that Biren was shot dead at point-blank range in full public view" and demanded an inquiry into the incident. The Police Commissioner blandly said, the statement was "untrue". "There is no reason to believe", he said, "that the local police version of the incident is incorrect."

Since November, such murders have become so common as almost to be accepted as a way of life in West Bengal. On November 3, three Naxalites were shot dead in three different parts of Calcutta. On each occasion, a party of detectives trying to round up wanted persons "ran into heavy bomb attack and fired in self-defence", killing all the attackers who were wanted. Five days later, in similar bomb-throwing incident the police killed a Naxalite youth of 18. American-style, the Additional Commissioner of Police was giving a body count of Naxalites killed by the police : altogether 21 Naxalites were killed and seven injured in police firing between October 30 and November 9.

But then came massacres on a scale before which the impressive record of early November paled into insignificance. On the night of November 20, four Naxalite youths in Beliaghata were dragged out of their beds and shot before an awe-struck public. The same night, 11 Naxalites were shot and their bullet-riddled bodies thrown along a highway in the Barasat area. A group of MPs visited Beliaghata and interviewed witnesses to the murder. Bullets of service revolvers found in the bodies of the youths found in the Barasat area and other reports published in ultraright papers like *Ananda Bazar Patrika* as to how they were rounded up in the Maidan area while holding a secret meeting left hardly anybody in doubt as to the "mystery" of the massacre. Ritualistically, "Left" parties demanded an inquiry and Mrs Gandhi, "shocked" beyond belief as she was, did order one.

The next big success of the police was at Beliaghata again when five men were killed in broad daylight.

This report is incomplete. All such reports will remain incomplete because the police have yet to complete their mission.

April 17, 1971

West Bengal

MORE OF THE SAME

A CORRESPONDENT

The cynical rulers have once more unleashed their well-trained police hounds on Naxalite prisoners, killing 16 of them and mangling up more, several of whom are sure to die, in the Dum Dum Jail. Apparently it was yet another attempted jail-break by the Naxalites, and this had "compelled" the police, quite against their will as ever, to fire and use their lathis on them. (Even *Jugantar* wrote that while the jail authorities said the deaths were due to lathi-charge, Lalbazar gave it out that all of them were killed by bullets.) But will this version stand even the loosest scrutiny ? The Dum Dum Jail, like all such places in neocolonial countries where fascist terror holds sway under democratic slogans, is a well-guarded place, and particularly so because it holds so many Naxalite youths who are deadly enemies of the existing order. Why then, if 30 or 40 completely unarmed prisoners had really tried to escape, couldn't they be surrounded and captured by hordes of armed warders, policemen and para-military staff thronging the place ? Why a fierce armed assault had to be launched on unarmed prisoners—fierce enough to kill 16 of the boys instantly and injure dozens—if the purpose was just to recapture them ? The answer is that the purpose was entirely different. The coolly laid out plan at the back of it all, made by the West Bengal police chiefs, probably under CIA guidance,

and obviously approved in principle by the Government of India, was to find excuses for killing off as many Naxalites *inside prisons* as possible. And this, equally obviously, is the counterpart of the long-approved plan of killing off as many Naxalites as possible *outside prisons*—by torturing them to death in police custody, by suddenly shooting them down in their haunts, by dragging them out of their homes, lining them up blindfolded against walls and gunning them down. When the police slaughter young Naxalites inside prisons, the cover they use is either a violent jailbreaking attempt or a murderous assault on innocent warders. The cover they use while shooting down Naxalites in the streets is that they had compelled the police to fire by launching bomb assaults on them.

Yet another report of assault on Naxalite prisoners—in Howrah Jail—has appeared. This time it has not been possible even for the police to cover up the deliberate nature of the assault. This is "democracy" at its glorious best, and the glory is sure to impress the people sooner or later.

May 22, 1971

Bihar

POLICE AND PEOPLE

N. K. SINGH

Police atrocities have grown in number and become more sophisticated in nature since the Naxalite growth in Bihar.

Perhaps the first ever 'Operation Naxalite' conducted in Bihar was in the Mushahari region of Muzaffarpur district in North Bihar. It was in late 1968, when Naxalite activities increased and a few 'class enemies' were killed that a combing operation was launched by the local police assisted by the hired goondas of zamindars. Since then, Mushahari, where the

Sarvodaya leader, Mr Jaya Prakash Narayan, was trying to save the skin of his class brethren, has become a happy playground for the hunting hounds.

At least two or three operations have been launched in the Surajgarha region of south Monghyr, followed by allegations of police highhandedness. The operations were rather modern and sophisticated in nature. For example, in one operation the service of more than 300 jawans of the Bihar Military Police were requisitioned from NEFA. Besides, 30 officers of the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police or above and 100 sub-inspectors were deputed to supervise the combing operation in the fields, the hills, the jungles and all the other suspected hideouts. The place was under the direct charge of a special police squad comprising border experts, senior intelligence officers and the combatant section of Military Police. The services of the Central Reserve Police were also requisitioned. Beside Home Guards, the local police also had been asked to stand by for any assistance the special squad might need. According to an unofficial report, a total of 6,000 troops had been pushed into the area. The armed force was functioning from a number of static camps and mobile units, equipped with wireless vans. To cap it all, helicopters were used to help the Military Police.

What was the outcome ? Four or five arrests. And that also was followed by allegations that the police arrested innocent people to cover up their failure to arrest the real 'culprits'. Grave allegations—ranging from loot to rape—were levelled against the police, especially the notorious Central Reserve Police. Even the higher strata were not spared. A bitter Naxalite leader put it thus : "*our* womenfolk have to work in fields, they are not much to look at ; *their* women-folk, enjoying all sorts of minimum comforts of life, are fragile, delicate and beautiful enough to attract the CRP wolves. *We* have very little to spare ; *they* own huge property". So the zamindars, rural kulaks and rich peasants were harassed by both the Naxal terrorists and the law and order arm of their own State machi-

nery. No wonder, voices were raised for removing the notorious CRP from the region and questions concerning police atrocities in Surajgarha were raised in the State Assembly.

In Katihar too, the district headquarters of Purnea, where the police had launched a special combing operation to curb the growing Naxalite activities in the towns and adjacent villages, a largely attended public meeting jointly sponsored by the Congress (R), PSP, SSP, CPI and CPI(M) protested against "indiscriminate arrests of railway employees, mill workers and students by the police in the name of curbing the Naxalites". It was alleged that the arrested men were beaten and tortured in the police lock-up.

To meet the Naxalite challenge, security measures have been tightened, weapons supplied to the police personnel and new methods of carrying rifles by policemen have been introduced all over the State. All police officers above the rank of assistant sub-inspector have been provided with revolvers. Police constables have been armed with special types of spears and knives. This is in addition to the deployment of para-military forces in disturbed zones. But the most important thing is that the police have been given a free hand to deal with the public.

Recently three cases of police atrocity were reported from the tribal belt of Chotanagpur.

The first was reported from Dhanbad where the Bihar police created a new record of official highhandedness when they opened fire on undertrial prisoners in the court hajat on March 16. Mr Arun Kumar Roy, the CPI(M) MLA from Dhanbad, described it as "the most ghastly act surpassing all records of police brutality in Bihar". There has been firing in jail, but this time it was in the court hajat in broad daylight under the nose of the magistracy and all the senior officers of the town.

On the day of the incident, more than 100 undertrial prisoners—described by the police as 'criminals'—were locked in rooms meant to accommodate 20. The cell—called lock-

up—had no ventilation and was never cleaned. No prisoner, it is said, was ever produced physically before the magistrate from this court hajat without a bribe. The magistrate only puts dates on custody warrants without seeing the face of the prisoner. It is said that on March 16, the prisoners refused to pay bribe for production, which led to a hot altercation. The prisoners were allegedly denied drinking water and when they protested, were fired upon in the lock-up from pointblank range.

The police, however, gave a fairy tale to cover their action. The walls of the hajat were broken and it was said that the prisoners were trying to escape. One wonders how concrete walls could be broken with bare hands.

The prisoners of the Dhanbad jail boycotted the court. The Dhanbad Bar Association came out with open condemnation of this brutal assault. A Patna daily commented : "In any civilized society police firing on helpless undertrial prisoners is a grave matter. When such a firing takes place in a court hajat, the dignity of the judiciary also suffers and it is brought under contempt".

The second case of police brutality was reported from the steel city of Jamshedpur which is known as the 'little Calcutta' of Bihar in view of the widespread Naxalite influence. On March 26, groups of students—one from the local K.M. P.M. H.S. School, which is said to be the main centre of Naxalite activities in the town, clashed over purchase of cinema tickets. The police intervened much too swiftly and attacked the K.M. P.M. H.S. School in course of "chasing the culprits". According to the school administration, the police entered the campus without the permission of the Principal or any order from the Magistrate or S.P. They struck the students with spears, bayonets and lathis. Doors of class-rooms were broken open, small boys were dragged out and beaten up. Some of the teachers who tried to protect the boys were also severely dealt with. What is particularly distressing to note is that the victims were just small boys. Three boys, all under

15, died. They were murdered. About 200 people, including students, teachers and the public were caught in this operation.

In an atmosphere surcharged with emotion, Jamshedpur observed a one-day complete bandh. There were protests from all quarters. The Bihar Government had to face loud protests in the Assembly. One MLA went to the extent of comparing it with Jallianwalla Bagh while another said that he had not seen such a heart-breaking incident during 42 years of his political career.

It is being whispered in Jamshedpur that the attack on the school was pre-planned and well organised. It was done in order to teach the Naxalite boys a good lesson. Have the people and the Naxalites become the same in the eyes of the administration ?

To crush the Naxals, an operation was launched in the Ghatshila area of Singhbhum district bordering West Bengal. In March, Naxalite guerillas attacked the Rupaskundi police picket, killed two policemen, injured three and snatched away nine rifles, 105 rounds of bullets and a few uniforms. It was followed by a massive combing operation launched under the personal guidance of the DIG, Southern Range, assisted by the SP, Singhbhum, and D.I., Ghatshila. Six hundred armed men were engaged in the operation and a police dog was airlifted from Patna to trace the guerillas. But none of the alleged Naxalites could be arrested.

While this massive, round-the-clock operation was in full swing, the Naxalite guerillas attacked a village in the Gopiballavpur area of West Bengal, killed four of their "class enemies" and injured two. The high police officers of both West Bengal and Bihar decided to launch a joint combing operation.

The inevitable result of this joint operation was grave allegations of repression and torture. It was said that the villagers, including womenfolk, were publicly insulted, tortured and beaten indiscriminately. Even the jewellery, cash and

other belongings of the poor rural folk were looted and the police forces took away fowls and goats for feasting.

"Laws", says Cicero, "are dumb in the midst of arms".

May 22, 1971

A FORGED LETTER

A CORRESPONDENT

The Revolutionary Communist leaders, Mr Tarimela Nagi Reddy and Mr Devulapalli Venkateswara Rao, now facing trial on conspiracy charges to overthrow the lawfully established government through violent means, obtained the Hyderabad Court's permission and addressed a press conference to denouce "as out and out forged" a letter alleged to have been written by Mr Devulapalli Venkateswara Rao to one Padmanabha Reddy of Anantapur District and a 'close relative' of Mr Nagi Reddy. The letter requested him to receive Rs 35 lakhs through VPP from a book publisher in Bombay at the instance of the North Korean Consulate in Bombay.

In a prepared statement, Mr Venkateswara Rao said, "The revolutionary movements in Asia, especially in India are advancing. The Government of India is not only suppressing the movement with its armed forces, it is also working to discredit the revolutionary movement by slandering it as foreign-inspired. No revolutionary movememt in any part of the world at any time ever succeeded on the basis of foreign help. In India too, we believe that the revolutionary movement will succeed only on the basis of its internal strength".

Mr Rao alleged that the letter was the work of the CIA in collaboration with the CBI who want to "implicate me, Comrade Nagi Reddy and our Party in one more conspiracy case." The statement further alleged that the Government of India was acting according to the dictates of American imperialism

and Soviet social-imperialism to discredit not only the Indian revolutionary movement but also the friendly States of the People's Republic of China and the Democratic Republic of Korea.

When a reporter asked the two leaders why they were anxious to contradict when the contents of the letter had not so far come out, Mr Nagi Reddy said, a big conspiracy was going on against them and their movement. In the context of the atmosphere now being created, for example in Ceylon and in East Bengal, through the press "we thought it was of utmost importance to contradict this fantasy".

The following is the text of the letter referred to above :

Devulapalli Venkateswararao, MA, BL.

Camp : Musheerabad Central Jail, Hyderabad.

Chairman Mao Zindabad, Comrade Nagireddy Zindabad.

Dear Shri Padmanabha Reddy,

You may wonder to receive this letter from an unknown hand. I am writing this letter under instructions from my comrade Shri Tarimala Nagireddy, who is now in Musheerabad Central Jail. I am his close friend and associate. We are hoping that we will be released from the prison within a few months to again wage armed struggle against this bourgeois and reactionary government to establish a people's communist government in India, in the footprints of People's Republic of China. As Chairman Mao said "Political power or Revolution comes only through the barrel of the gun". But as you know it's very difficult to dethrone this popular government without the financial support of some friendly countries like People's China and North Korea. We, the Revolutionary Communists must acquire arms i. e., rifles, machine guns, handgrenades, crude bombs etc., from some agencies within India secretly, to train thousands of our comrades who are in Srikakulam and Adilabad tribal areas, in waging guerilla type of armed struggle against the government. So Chairman Mao instructed the Chinese printing presses which are at Shanghai and Canton cities of China to print one crore counterfeit

Indian currency notes of Rs 100 denomination (i. e. 100,00,000,00 Rs). So we will get 100 crore rupees of counterfeit notes from People's China which is to be distributed to the Naxalites and Revolutionary Communists throughout the country by the North Korean Consulate in Bombay. For our (A.P. Revolutionary Communists) share, we get 35 lakh rupees. But the problem is with whom this huge sum of money should be kept (as all of us are in prison) until we are released from the prison. We discussed this problem for 3 days and finally Comrade Nagireddy suggested your name and he said he trusted you because you are his close relative besides nobody will doubt you as you are a landlord. So we asked the Korean embassy to despatch the money to your address by VPP under the name New India Publishing House, Bombay. On the next day I wrote a letter to you informing you about this but I found no way to post the letter as on the same day I was moved to Vijayawada under strong police escort to appear before the sessions judge. In the meanwhile the Korean Consulate, Bombay, as told by us sent currency notes worth 35 lakh rupees to you by VPP under the name New India Publishing House, Bombay. But you promptly rejected the V.P. Parcel because you did not receive my letter and you never imagined that ordinary V.P. Parcel contained Rs 35 lakhs. So it's our fault and we again wrote to the Korean Consulate to despatch the money to your address. So you please accept the V.P. Parcel which comes to you within a couple of days this time under the name Super Book House, Bombay. Please keep this money in some secret place. We promise you to pay 10 lakhs out of this 35 lakhs if you satisfactorily keep this amount until we are released. Don't disclose this even to your wife in the country, it will be very dangerous to both you and us. Please burn this letter immediately after receiving. You will receive the parcel within 15 to 20 days. Trust you will help yourself by helping us.

With regards faithfully yours

D. V. Rao

P.S. I am sending this letter with one of Comrades to post it at Anantapur because the C.I.D.s are censoring our letters at Hyderabad.

Warning : If this agreement is not favourable to you please reject the V.P. Parcel, but don't try to fool us after receiving the money. If you are honest we will pay you as promised.

The inland letter was addressed to Shri P. Padmanabha Reddy, Ramasagaram, Krishnapuram (P.O.), Penugon Taluq, Anantapur (Dt) A.P.

May 29, 1971

Andhra Pradesh

WHAT TO DO ?

C. CHANDRASEKHARA RAO

"Though no significant Naxalite activity has been reported recently in another of their strongholds, Khammam and Warangal districts, there is no indication that the movement has died down there. There has been a tradition of communist insurgency in this area. Since the forties Naxalite activity in Srikakulam has been more dramatic but in Khammam it has been persistent and deep rooted". (*Indian Express*, Vijayawada edition, 7-2-1970).

Just after a year this was written, the civil authorities have been forced to move in army units to control the situation. This was done on the night of March 1, at strategic points all over the forest areas of the two districts. Mulug taluk in Warangal district alone has over 1,000 men of the Kumaon Regiment. It is estimated that anything between 4,000 troops took up positions in Warangal, Khammam and Karimnagar districts. This is in addition to the 4,000 and 5,000 CRP, SAP and other para-military units already in the area.

Probably this is the first time in the past two decades that army units had to be moved in to control revolutionary activities. Even in West Bengal it was to "ensure peaceful polling" that the army moved in.

What happened during the last year to warrant this move ?

In April 1969, the Revolutionary Communist Committee of Andhra Pradesh led by Mr T. Nagi Reddy adopted the now famous document "The Immediate Programme".

One of the main points mentioned in the document was that in the forest areas of Warangal and Khamman districts, the people's movement has transgressed the general legal limits... The cardinal point in agrarian revolution would be abolition of the landlord system and distribution of land to the tiller. It also means the liberation of rural masses from all forms of feudal exploitation.

Fertile land and fruit gardens that had been grabbed from Girijan peasants are still in the hands of landlords. People have been anxious to take them back. "We must prepare them to occupy these lands. Attacks from Government armed police would start. With this our resistance would have to be unleashed too...also we have to take the agrarian revolution forward basing it on the path of 'People's War'. Then alone we could march forward."

The first step was taken in April 1969, when the landlords as a precautionary measure were neutralised and made ineffective.

The Government's reaction was to move in District Reserve Police and Special Armed Police.

Once the landlords and other exploiting classes had been neutralised, the land programme was taken up in right earnest. Thousands of acres of Government waste land were occupied. Along with this all forms of Girijan exploitation were stopped. It took almost a year to implement the first stage.

Hundreds of Girijans occupying the lands were imprisoned. Along with indiscriminate arrests, the repressive police machinery went into action and the inhabitants of whole villages

were tortured to reveal the whereabouts of the revolutionary leaders. Repression led to a hardening of feelings amongst the Girijans against the police and the Government.

The masses in neighbouring taluks began to appreciate the work done in Mulug taluk, Warangal district. So much so the movement spread to Narsampet and Parkal taluks in Warangal District, Yellandu, Burugampahad, Nugur taluks in Khammam District and Mantheni taluk in Karimnagar District. A total area covering 5,000 to 6,000 sq. miles and inhabited by about 350,000 to 400,000 population came under the control of the revolutionaries.

Towards the end of 1969, CRP units were also moved in and repression increased. The movement gained momentum in direct proportion to police repression.

The State Government, rather the Stolypin of Andhra Pradesh, Mr Vengal Rao, the Home Minister, realised that it was not just a law and order problem. *The Times of India*, Bombay, on January 3, 1970, wrote an editorial saying that "meaningful steps in various social and economic fields" were necessary if the Naxalite challenge was to be met effectively. The State Government had announced a series of measures intended to improve the lot of the Girijans, including restrictions on the activities of moneylenders and tradesmen, grant of land-possession certificates, improvement of irrigation facilities and monetary grants for buying bullocks and agricultural implements.

To hoodwink the masses the Government issued notices of eviction on landlords occupying tribal lands. The same Vengal Rao addressing a meeting of landlords at Cherla, Nugur taluq, in February 1970, advised them to move the courts for stay orders. What hypocrisy !

Eviction notices apart, the Government tried to bribe the tribals by distributing clothes, tobacco etc. and in some cases money gifts. The revolutionaries could warn the tribals about the trap laid for them. Educated by them, the tribals started asking Ministers and officials what they were doing about the

land the Girijans had lost to the landlords. The answer was torture.

According to the Government, special laws to protect the Girijans were enacted in 1917 in the old Madras State to which Nugur taluk was then attached. The same laws became applicable to the rest of the Girijan areas in Warangal, Khammam and Karimnagar districts in 1963 only. The Government pleads that as the law was enacted recently, it is helpless in the Telengana area to which the three districts belong.

The question is why can't the Government implement the law at least in Nugur, Bhadrachalam and other taluqs where the Act had been in force since 1917 ? Even in the Telengana area most of the grabbing of Girijan land started from about 1960-61 and reached the peak in 1964-66.

In 1965, the Government, to regularise sales of land in Telengana, passed an order now known as "50-B". Registration of land sales was unknown in Telengana for a long time and with the passing of land reform bills in 1951, the process became all the more difficult, so much so that even without registration land sales were common. This led to difficulties maintaining land record. The taluq land registers would show one name, while actual occupant was different. In some cases land has changed hands half a dozen times, yet the name of the original owner remains in the records.

To regularise records, rule "50-B" was introduced. Under it the taluq office itself could, after due enquiry, register the land in the names of the present occupants if they could show documentary proof that they had bought it before 1960.

Rule "50-B" became a rule for corruption and wholesale forgeries. The then tahsildar of Mulug, employing some top Congressmen as his agents, undertook mass registrations of land. Girijan land taken on lease was registered in the names of new owners, using forged documents, etc. Thousands of acres of such rich land passed to landlords. The tahsildar became rich overnight. Even the otherwise blind Government

had to institute an enquiry. Of course nothing came out of this as top Congressmen were involved in the whole racket.

Though stay orders were obtained a year ago the Government is not making any effort to have the orders vacated. It is not in the least interested in de-grabbing Girijan land from the landlords. Even if the Government is to implement the 1917 Act in Nugur and the 1963 Act in the Telengana area, a lot of Girijan land would revert to the Girijans. But it is easier and cheaper to torture and shoot them than let them have their land back.

Ignoring that by the term 'Girijan' the revolutionaries mean 'anybody in that area who is a son of the soil and is downtrodden and exploited,' the Government tried to implement a policy of divide and rule by differentiating between tribals and non-tribals. As the revolutionary movement did not allow such differences, the Girijans were not deceived by the Government.

Torture, bribery, promises, everything that is in the capitalist armoury was tried. Liquidation of a few well-known traitors and informers by the revolutionaries solved the problem.

Freed from fear of informers, traitors and police agents and with the revolutionaries implementing their programme with zeal, the Girijans, from passive spectators became active participants in the struggle.

Village committees came into existence to safeguard the interests of the revolutionary movement. With these taking over local control and defence, the revolutionaries were free to advance and spread the programme to new areas. Since mid-1970 the movement has expanded to embrace villagers in the plains and in spite of the repressive machinery, today it covers an area of about 7,000 to 8,000 square miles with a population of nearly 500,000/600,000.

The Government is spending crores of rupees on paving new roads, constructing bridges etc. for quicker movement. Wireless transmitters have become as common as transistors.

But even the most reactionary of the landlords and other exploiting classes in the area have been neutralised and are offering the repressive machinery no co-operation. For all practical purposes civil rule is absent.

Realising their helplessness, the civil authorities on March 1, handed over the area to the army to implement "Phase Three" of the repressive programme.

According to reliable information, "Phase Three" is the same as the American "strategic villages" plan in Vietnam i.e., herding together many scattered villages into concentration camps, so that food supplies do not reach the revolutionaries.

On the night of March 15, after giving a warning to the repressive machinery almost a month ahead, the revolutionaries struck at Pagederu, Khamman district, and removed from scene two well-known police agents, though Pagederu and surrounding villages had a heavy concentration of the law and order forces.

This unnerved the forces and a repressive campaign was launched against villagers within a radius of ten miles of Pagederu. Indiscriminate beating and torture of men, women and children was the order of the day. The Indian Army probably was trying to cover itself with glory by taking a major role in the brutal repression.

As usual, a top-level conference of repression officials took place at Warangal in the last week of March and it was decided to bring in additional men. Camps have been set up in villages all over the area—the maximum distance between villages being not more than 2 to 3 miles. No movement by civilians is allowed after dusk between villages and after dark in the villages. Normal life has come to a standstill and the village economy is in the doldrums.

By April 23 this year, *The Times of India* carried two items, contradicting each other. One was about an interview given by Mr Vengal Rao to newsmen at Madras in which he claimed "that there no longer was a 'Naxalite' problem, in a big way. Even the trouble spots were identified and dealt with

firmly". Rao went further and "paid a tribute to the Andhra police for the 'challenging task' they had accomplished during the last two years to root out the menace".

The other, a *Times of India* News Service item datelined, Hyderabad, 22nd April, had this to say "...In the Warangal and Khamman districts in Telengana the extremists led by the Nagi Reddy Group, have become active again...they are carrying on intimidation and assault on public servants, a senior official who has visited the district said."

The two news items give a clear picture of the confusion into which the Government has been thrown.

The other side of the picture is that the revolutionaries lack fire-power. Mao has rightly said that it is men that count, not weapons. But still what will you do ?

June 12, 1971

Letter

WHAT TO DO ?

The claims made by C. Chandrasekhara Rao, in his Andhra Report 'What to do' are not true.

The line advocated in the 'now famous' 'Immediate Programme' was : Intensify mass movements on mass issues which naturally would be subjected to the onslaught of the forces of repression. At the height of such a movement arm the masses for mass resistance.

Armed resistance in defence of mass movement—such is the line which was counterposed to the line of annihilation of class-enemies to seize political power advocated by the CPI(ML).

The Nagi Reddy line is of a defensive nature, legal in form, economic in its immediate and political in its ultimate aims. The CPI(ML) line is offensive in nature, illegal in form,

political in its immediate aim, and for ultimate economic salvation.

More than two years have elapsed since these two lines distinctly emerged. Each line had its share of successes and setbacks in their implementation and have yielded enough results for everyone to judge.

While the CPI(ML) proclaimed seizure of political power in Srikakulam, Debra-Gopiballavpur and elsewhere, announced the formation of the People's Liberation Army, and even while the neo-colonial state had to admit burning down whole villages and regroup the people into strategic hamlets, Messers Nagi Reddy & Co. have been proclaiming that liberated areas can not be formed till a new stage emerges wherein all the armed force of the State would be pinned by mass resistance across the whole country.

Their line was put to trial in Anantapur, Kurnool, West and East Godavari and Nalgonda districts. Government waste land was occupied in all these districts during April-November 1969. Preparations for armed resistance had not even been contemplated and where they were, as in East Godavari Agency, the result was a miserable failure. All the organisers are in jail, while people in about 175 trespass cases have been going in for arbitration by bourgeois courts.

This line of land-grab emulated later by the revisionists and other parties on a country-wide scale as a check to the growing consciousness of the people, was subjected to withering criticism by their own provincial committee, which ultimately led to disciplinary action against its Secretariat member, C. Pulla Reddy.

Since the ill-famed 'Immediate Programme' was adopted not a single mass movement has been launched. All forms of Girijan exploitation continue. Forest, revenue and police officials, besides landlords, moneylenders and contractors continue their exploitation unhampered.

In 1970 March, the P. C. representative guiding the Mulug Area committee entered into electoral alliance with certain

landlord groups to oppose the rest, while the campaign for boycott was conducted by the squads as a face-saving tactic.

While the report boasts of 'village committees' of whole areas coming 'under control of revolutionaries' and says that "for all practical purpose civil rule is absent,' in reality there was not even a party unit in the villages. Not only that, village panchayats are running smoothly and the age-old feudal practices of village elders (patels) and caste traditions are strictly observed. The so-called 'movement' has no influence over the thinking habits and social set-up of the people in the area.

The army units, called in in March 1971, were deployed 'to ensure peaceful polling' and left after their specific job was finished. The only incident reported during the period of army presence is one in which 3 armed reserve (dt.) constables accompanied by DSP chased a squad.

In the liquidation programme the people were never mobilised to convene people's courts to pass judgments. Even revolutionary peasant committees have not been formed to guarantee that justice is meted out. Well-known landlords and traitors move about in the whole area while 'revolutionary squads' seek shelter in hillocks and deep jungles.

For recruitment from among the local population, the main source is deserters and vagabonds in the absence of party and peasant organisations in the villages. This explains the dominance of the roving rebel ideology among the squad committees. Any guerilla squad or organisation at the initial stages of its emergence is likely to be swayed by such a harmful bourgeois ideology but the point is that it is the dominant ideology holding sway in their committees.

The existence of these armed squads does not pose any danger to the exercise of the political power by the landlord class. Taking into cognizance the support extended by these revolutionaries to certain sections of landlord, the Government has deployed only such force and is employing only such methods as would enable its men to train themselves

in jungle warfare, then send them to wipe out Naxalites i.e. the CPI(ML).

Mr Chandrasekhara Rao says that hundreds of Girijans occupying the lands were imprisoned. Not a single Girijan was imprisoned on this pretext in this area, for such instances of occupation were lacking. In the course of these two years, around 200 people belonging to the struggle area were imprisoned on false charges of having been apprehended during encounters. Most of them were either acquitted or released on unconditional bail and presently no more than 40 people are in different jails at Warangal, Gothaguden, Yellendu, Khammam, Karimnagar. Contrast this with the more than 800 in Rajahmundry jails for over two years, and thousands of them regrouped into strategic hamlets in Srikakulam district.

T. CHINNI

July 31, 1971 Visakhapatnam

Assam

SEEING RED

A CORRESPONDENT

The Government of Assam has finally declared war on the Naxalites. The Chief Minister never lets an opportunity slip, when making public addresses, to speak of the Naxalite menace and how this has been imported from the neighbouring State of West Bengal to disturb the calm and contentment in Assam. Youths are urged to join hands with the patriots in exorcising this spectre. Some months back, a high-powered cell under a senior police officer was set up to tackle the growth of Naxalism in Assam and it is reported that after adequate training the Assam Police are now confident. This confidence has been displayed of late in the random arrests and summary detention

of countless young men all over the State. The CPI leader, Mr Phani Bora, said in the Assembly the other day that the Congress Government was committing a serious mistake in arresting members of his party as Naxalites and that "in such cases people might get restive. Administration should be decentralised and brought nearer the people". And of course, that is being done. The police at least are much nearer the people today and have been given the license to pick up anyone they choose. Most Left parties in the State believe that the Naxalite problem should be tackled without further delay and they are prepared to render any assistance to the Government. In this they are being joined by "Left intellectuals" and "progressive" writers. The people's movement, they fear, is about to be disrupted by a handful of youths who in collusion with the CIA are trying to question the socialism of these established socialists.

Till recently, most of those arrested as Naxalites were described as agents from West Bengal, having nothing to do with the local people. Government publicity media, the bourgeois press, Congress and CPI leaders, and Left intellectuals are all joining hands to isolate the movement from the common people and the most vulgar of communal slogans are being raised. Anything that helps curb the menace is welcome. Whether one calls it Left adventurism, a CIA conspiracy or a Pakistani plot, is of no matter. The odds can be straightened out later. Yet with such solid backing why is the government so panicky ? And why are the police picking up anyone who dares to speak up against the government as well as against the established political parties ? The formula that the Assam Police have discovered in fighting Naxalism is simple. Anyone refusing to accept the logic of the Congress or the CPI, PSP and the SSP (these are the main opposition parties in the State) must be a Naxalite.

Yes, young men in Assam have started thinking on different lines and the movement is fast striking roots in this apparently quiet and complacent State. Things take some time to start

here but once they catch on, they spread fast. That is perhaps why even the most complacent of Congress bosses in the State are displaying signs of anxiety and fear. Although it is somewhat too early to ascertain whether the revolutionary work being done in the Assam villages is directed by a centralised command, the existence of the CPI(ML) is being strongly felt in several parts of lower Assam, particularly in Kamrup and Goalpara. And throughout the State, small dedicated groups are functioning and it is only a question of time when full co-ordination will be reached under the leadership of the CPI(ML). The coming together of these groups has been prevented not because of ideological differences, but because of the underground nature of the movements which makes frequent contact rather difficult. This has to be achieved immediately. The betrayal of the revolutionary movement in the State in the early fifties by the CPI has not been forgotten and the Assamese peasant, once roused can display a tenacity of purpose which can work wonders. It is true that in the elections the Congress swept the polls but to those who have rejected the path of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, such elections mean very little, however much the election results are used as cudgels to beat the revolutionaries with. Elections or no elections, the work is continuing and in the next few years Assam will record the change. But lack of contact and exchange of views between the different groups is posing a problem.

June 12, 1971

West Bengal

A REPORT ON BIRBHUM

A CORRESPONDENT

After Srikakulam and Debra it is Birbhum. There the CPI(ML) has built up a stronghold. The party has already spread over the entire district, at least at police station level.

Uptil now near-about 50 persons have been killed by the CPI(ML). Of them, more than half were landowners and moneylenders and the rest both petty and big government officials including the police. More than 255 arms including rifles, muskets and revolvers have been snatched with plenty of ammunition and the number of 'liberated' villages, though scattered all over the district and isolated from one another, has been rapidly increasing. Although truck-loads of CRP are seen patrolling the village streets, they seem rather sceptical of success and their gestures have proved it beyond doubt that their duty has become a liability to them. The sooner they can get rid of it the better. One CRP officer expressed his embarrassment to me, "These Naxalites are moving like rats, it is very difficult to capture them."

There was no exaggeration in this remark. At Bolpur, Dubrajpuri, Suri, Rampurhat and other towns the CPI(ML) boys are openly moving in daylight. Those who belong to the respective locality are all well-known. But nobody dares to identify them ; even the local Bengal Police have turned strictly neutral, because constables and officers who dared to chase CPI(ML) workers or sympathizers have met their doom. One single instance will show how panic-stricken the local police are. Towards the end of the last month, the local unit of the CPI(ML) at Bolpur came to learn that a new CID constable, Dilip Chakraborty, had been employed against them and that he had been seen along the lanes and bye-lanes of Ukilpatti. Immediately dozens of its boys began to follow Dilip, his every movement from dawn to dusk. At last they became sure that

he was a spy and killed him. The story of the operation against Dilip has been collected from an eye-witness who lives at Ukilpatti where the operation took place. At about 2 p. m. Dilip was seen running very fast along the main lane of Ukilpatti towards the Bolpur-Palitpur Road. Behind him was a young man, his face covered by mask and he had a pipegun. He fired, the bullet hit Dilip but the injury was not fatal, so he could continue running. But as soon as he reached the junction of Ukilpatti lane and Bolpur-Palitpur Road, two boys appeared as if from nowhere, knifed him on both sides of the chest and then disappeared crying "An agent has been killed. Long live Mao. Long live CPI(ML)." The police outpost is only 75 yards away from the spot where Dilip fell. As men on the street began to gather round the body and their noise gradually increased, the officer-in-charge of the outpost climbed up the roof of his office building. He had behind him dozens of sepoys, all armed and ready for fresh attack. (But they were sure that there was no Naxalite to attack them !) The OC, from the housetop, began to shout "disperse, disperse, my men are going." The people dispersed, but even after that nobody came from the outpost to take possession of the dead body. The OC feared that he might be gunned down, the constables feared they might be gunned down, so there was none to bell the cat. At last after one and half hours more than a dozen constables cautiously stepped out of the outpost, appeared on the spot and carried back the corpse of the CID constable. Perhaps the OC realised that such timidity would induce the local people to ridicule him and also invite the wrath of the higher officials if they could in any way come to learn about the incident ; so nobody was arrested. No enquiry was made and after this no policemen, either in uniform or in plain-clothes, dares enter Ukilpatti.

Although in comparison to other areas the activities of the CPI(ML) in Birbhum have started much later—the history of the rise of the party can not be traced beyond six or seven months—uptil now it has succeeded in extending itself and its

operations have seldom failed. Another thing, which is an encouraging factor for the party, is that the number of its workers and sympathisers is fast increasing. A large number of local people, especially the students, have been attracted to it. That its confidence and audacity have also increased can be seen in the following incidents.

Only two weeks ago, Narayan Banerjee, a weathy business-man of Battala (Bolpur P.S.) was murdered by the CPI(ML). At about 6 p.m., Narayan was sitting under a banian tree near his rice mill where more than two hundred people were husking rice from paddy or were engaged in other work. Six young men came to Narayan and placed before him a sheet of paper and requested him to get it printed for them from his press (Narayan also owned a small press). He stood up and asked them to come to the press along with him. No sooner had he proceeded a step than one of the boys hit him on the back of his head with a *ramdao* and two other pushed their knives into his abdomen. Narayan groaned and fell down on the ground. He tried to crawl. His men were watching the the scene. But they were all ashen grey. They could not move. The young men began to walk towards the crowded station road, instead of running along the more desolate and less dangerous Bolpur-Supur Road. The shopkeepers and others who saw them did not dare cry out, they soon left that place abandoning their business.

On June 19, more than 200 men entered Itinda, a village in Bolpur P.S. They had with them 25 rifles, six or seven revolvers, bombs and spears. They encircled the house of the Pynes, a land-owning family of the village, dragged the head of the family out of his room, lined him up against a big mango tree and then knifed him to death. The Santals who participated in the action were chanting the favourite slogans of the CPI(ML). A large number of villagers gathered on the spot as silent onlookers. None of them dared make any protest. The party then dispersed through the paddy fields.

On the same day, another party of about 300 men, some of them armed with rifles, muskets, pipeguns, pistols, bombs and spears, entered Madhabpur village and raided the home of Tarapada Daktar, an LMF practitioner. He was also a big notorious landowner. Dozens of Santals and young men chanting, "Kill kill, kill Tarapada", invaded the rooms and dragged him out. He was then tied to the trunk of a tree just in front of his home. His relatives came out and began to weep, some of them fainted and others fell at the feet of the leaders and begged for the doctor's life. Meanwhile, almost all the villagers gathered on the spot. After some time, one of the leaders made a very brief speech narrating Tara's misdeeds. He then asked, "What sentence does he deserve? Do you want him to live and spoil the society? Do you?" A large number of people, especially the Santals who were in the procession cried, "Death, death, he deserves death and nothing else." "Then Tarapada will die," replied the leader. He then gave a rifle to a Santal and ordered him to kill the doctor. The Santal took up position and fired at the doctor's head but missed. The man did not die. The leader then gave the rifle to a young man. The boy fired just one round and the bullet pierced the heart of Tarapada. He died instantaneously. The rifle with which Tarapada was killed had been snatched from another big landowner, who was a very good friend of Tarapada.

On June 18, more than 40 young men entered Kankalitala on the bank of Rabindranath's beloved Kopai. They had with them seven rifles, about the same number of pistols and two airbags loaded with bombs. They approached a wealthy landowner and ordered him to cook for them. The landowner considered himself lucky enough because the punishment might have been death. He prepared the lunch for his 'guests' with great care, the latter enjoyed old man's fear and the food and then left his home. In the meantime, some trucks full of the CRP were seen in the village streets. As they started chasing the boys, they crossed the river and

entered the jungle. The CRP were happy. They shouted, "Bhag gia, bhag gia," and went back to beat the innocent boys of the village.

The moneylenders of the districts, like the landowners, are the most unhappy people. They have been told that if they fail to return the deposits of their clients and if they refuse to forego their claims on both the interest and the loans to the farmers, they will be killed and their bodies thrown to street dogs. This has created unprecedented panic among the moneylenders and a large number of them have obeyed the instructions and others are likely to do so in the near future. One Sudhir Kumar of Ukilpatti was served with a notice from the party that he would be killed and his shop burnt down. Sudhir immediately contacted the party's local unit, promised not to run his business in future and to return the deposits of his clients without any claim to the interest and loans. The party, therefore, has changed its decision, Sudhir has not been killed. Another moneylender, Samanta, received the same notice. At first he took things rather lightly and bargained with the representatives of the party over the payment of interest and loans. He was then served with another notice in which something to this effect was written : "If you dare to disobey our instructions, next morning your relatives and friends will find your head rolling on the road." The moneylender realised that he had already reached the limit, one more step would be dangerous. He therefore wrote over the entrance of his shop : "My clients are hereby requested to take back their deposits within 72 hours. They will not have to pay the interest on the loans. I have decided to wind up my business."

The case of Kumar and Samanta have had their impact upon other moneylenders. Although they are grinding their teeth in anger, they are expected to yield before the decision of the ML boys.

But had the activities of CPI(ML) in Birbhum remained limited to such actions ? There would not have been much to

distinguish their present role from the one they have played in other parts of this province. Here they have cowed down all other political parties, including the CPI(M) and the ruling Congress and have almost been running a parallel administration in the major towns and villages including Bolpur, Suri, Rampurhat, Dubrajpur and Surul. It should be remembered that in the last general elections the CPI(M) won the maximum number of seats from this district and therefore deserves to be counted as major political force. The ruling Congress, though its performance in the polls was utterly hopeless, has had at its disposal all the coercive machinery which it has already put into action, but both the parties are no match for the CPI(ML).

A young man, who was until a month ago the secretary of local Yuba Congress, confessed that he resigned his secretaryship out of fear. He was given a death sentence by the CPI(ML), and his younger brother who is a cadre of that party requested him to cut off his connection with the Yuba Congress. This ex-Yuba Congress leader said that there was a lengthy discussion between him and his brother over Marxism and CPI(ML)'s ideology and programme, and finally he agreed to come out of the Yuba Congress. 'My brother was right, I can realise it now', he said.

A large number of local boys who once leaned towards the Congress camp have now turned sincere sympathisers of the CPI(ML) and the real threat to the parliamentary parties is coming from their side.

However, there are doubts among the common people about the role of the CPI(ML), some of whose acts seem very strange to them. So far as the murders are concerned, people describe them arbitrary actions and ask why the party does not hold a people's court and put the man on trial before killing him. As already described, the local party unit at Bolpur, before killing two big landowners in the presence of the villagers, asked them to suggest punishment for the two persons. But in these cases it was the Santals who had joined the proce-

ssion who gave the verdict, not the local people. They wanted to avoid involvement and did not open their mouths. Thus, though the operation was public, there was no real people's court.

As a result, the people appear very critical about the party's 'annihilation' operations. They say, "You will not realise your offence even after your death until they put up some posters on the walls to explain it."

Many petty businessmen of Suri, Rampurhat and Bolpur have been threatened. They wonder why, and ransack their memory for their offence. Some of them ask why the CPI(ML) avoids holding a public trial of its enemies. This proves its organisational weakness. If more errors are committed, that will be fatal for the party.

The operations against the moneylenders, though a source of encourgement to the poor people, specially to the day labourers, have one loophole. As moneylenders were instructed to return all the deposits to their clients, people who had never deposited anything started pressing for money and gold. As a result, the liabilities of the moneylenders extended beyond their capacity. Moreover, this has led to mutual jealousy and suspicion among many individuals. Those who dislike their neighbours have described them to the CPI(ML) as moneylenders and then placed before them many embarrassing demands.

The party's local unit at Surul (P.S. Bolpur) a few days ago staged a march of its "red army" along an eight-mile track from Sriniketan to Jadavpur. There were Santals and others carrying rifles and muskets. The police had the information but did not turn up. Even the CRP refused to face the marching Naxalites. This proves the increasing organisational strength of the party. But uptil now its activities have been limited mainly among the Santals and there too economic demands have been emphasized rather than the ideology and programme of the party.

Topographically, Birbhum is an ideal place for operations.

But it is not the topography of a country but that of the human mind, exploration and exploitation of which is the foremost precondition of success for a true Marxist party.

June 26, 1971

ANOTHER REPORT ON BIRBHUM

A. B.

The Suri morgue now is one of the busiest of the district morgues in West Bengal. The attendant there is a busy and a happy man since most of the bodies brought there mean some 'fee' for his professional skill. He has never had it so good.

Most of his wares belong to so-called village gentry, some of whom have the additional brand of moneylender. The relations of the victims invariably want quick disposal from the morgue and do not mind a tenner for the attendant. He boastfully claims that Rs. 50 a day is his average earning now.

He, unfortunately, is not uniformly lucky. The peon, the carpenter and some others of that sort who came there—not by themselves but on cots made by bamboo poles—were unable to oblige him. That, of course, is part of the game and has to be accepted with composure.

Now why is the Suri morgue so busy these days? The walls claim that this is due to the activities of the CPI(ML) while a Congress leader claims them to be CPM work. The guerillas of the CPI(ML), the walls claim, are annihilating the class enemies systematically and that keeps the morgue so busy. The victims were, in fact, already stinking living corpses and by killing them the guerillas were performing a duty to society.

Before we go further, it is necessary to set out the broad scene in the district of Birbhum. It is predominantly rural

where as much as 92% of the population live in villages and as much as 95% directly depend on agriculture. There is practically no industry though 70 odd rice mills employ about 5,000 men. Unemployment is rampant and the under-employed consider themselves fortunate. Poverty is extensive as in many other districts but there was hardly any articulation. Barring a few pockets, orthodox left political parties have had no real base. Exploitation of the poor was an art practised by the better-off-ones without exception and the victims merely cursed their luck. Though big jotedars are few, medium jotedars are many and they are more or less self-supporting, thanks largely to the Mayurakshi project. Both the big and medium jotedars are exploiters of sorts and extract interest at crushing rates from the bargadars and kisans against crop loan usually advanced during the lean months. Usurious practices and pawn taking are quite common. There is hardly any village without a few jotedar-cum-pawnbrokers. There are many other types of exploitation including deprivation of rights to land and of share of grains, and free and forced labour. Thus Birbhum has been a picture of undiluted feudal oppression and exploitation.

The situation in the district was such as to attract serious attention of leftist parties and of them, the CPM and the SUC made serious attempts to organise the 'have-nots'. That they were successful only in pockets was largely due to the generally apathetic attitude of the have-nots and partly to their own organisational shortcomings. It is unfortunate that the district has hardly witnessed any militant peasant movement during the last 50 years. This is not merely because of the absence of a militant political party but also because of the general apathy to revolt. There is, therefore, a political vacuum amongst the poor peasantry.

It is in this setting that the CPI(ML) decided to intervene in this district. Initially, they secured their sympathisers from amongst college students followed by students in the upper classes of the schools. The first wall slogans started appearing

at Suri, Rampurhat and other urban centres around May-June, 1970. Gutting of schools and then of offices began in October-November. By February 1971, there was hardly any school in the urban centres that did not have the privilege of being burnt. Quite a few schools in the rural areas were also burnt. Activists in most cases were, however, still confined to towns.

It was in December that the first murder of a 'class enemy' took place at Suri ; the victim was a college student owing allegiance to another political organisation. Interestingly, the murder took place as a sequel to inter-club rivalry. The victim in his dying declaration named, amongst others, the son of the most important moneylender-cum-pawnbroker of Suri. The accused, understandably, went underground.

This murder was the green signal to the new phase and the process has continued without stop.

Elections were impending. The CPI(ML) urged people, often with threat of death, to boycott the poll. Other political parties were not idle and started preparing for elections. A large number of posters put up by the CPI(ML) written in red ink were on the reverse white side of Congress posters. How they came by these Congress posters was a mystery. Everybody carefully avoided the posters of the CPI(ML) but there were a few cases where Congress posters were pasted over them. Normally this would not have been possible unless of course the same set of people were putting up both types of posters.

Sometime around February, the CPI(ML) activists took upon the task of building their armoury by snatching guns. Initially some police guns were snatched. It was therefore widely believed that a very large number of guns would be snatched from the polling booths during the elections as each booth had two guns. But barring one case at Rampurhat, no guns were taken during the elections.

Gun snatching became a daily occurrence from April onwards. Guns were no longer to be snatched for they were now available merely for the asking from private licensees.

Guns taken away total over 200 of which about 20 are claimed by the authorities to have been recovered. The administration sensing the potential danger involved in taking away of guns from private licensees in particular, asked for the guns to be deposited with thanas. This was done promptly in the affected areas. Thus a large area was denuded of private arms.

The situation stimulated two sets of results. The Naxalites mounted their offensive against class enemies with great vigour. Isolated cases of murder were continuing right from December but the total number in any month upto April did not even reach double figures. May and June, however, have seen over 50 murders each month and during the week ending June 21, as many as 28 murders took place. Most of these were attributed to the Naxalites and claimed by wallings to be their job. Of about 175 murdered so far, 5 are policeman, 27 are big jotedars or their family members (having 25 acres or more either in their names and/or others',) 32 medium jotedars or their family members (having between 10 and 25 acres), 26 small jotedars or their family members (having less than 10 acres), 12 usurers, 11 dacoits (10 of whom were killed by village resistance groups and the other by the Naxalites), 7 police agents, and the rest of unclassified categories are a few landless labourers and three government servants.

The second result has been large-scale looting and arson by various gangs of really anti-social elements in the countryside denuded of private arms. This has created a serious state of panic. Evacuation of some well-to-do village gentry to towns even in other districts has been reported. There is general demoralisation in the countryside which was so long confined only to towns. Some village gentry claim to have entered into understanding with these elements and are paying protection money.

What is the role of the administration in this situation ? The top echelons of the district administration arranged for their own sečurity and stopped moving except with armed guards. It is also said that they remain in a state of stupor

after dusk with the help of a few pegs. Nevertheless, the first few murders received some attention from the police. At least in 4 cases, police dogs were employed. Necessarily, a few suspects were arrested but what happened to them is known to none. With the steep increase in murders, arson and dacoity, even the semblance of police investigation has ceased. Gun snatching, however, stimulated different reactions. Large areas were cordoned off with military assistance and scores of 'suspects' detained for interrogation. Most of them were of course released after they paid their 'release fee' running very often into four figures. Harrassment of the general public knew no bounds. There were merciless beatings resulting often in hospitalisation, detention under the PVA Act and application of other draconian laws. Significantly, however, no 'encounter' was simulated even though at Rampurhat, 5 suspects with blood-stained clothes and with 3 rifles snatched from policemen after murdering one of them a little while ago, were found and arrested. Apparently, 'instructions' of the Home Department had not gone home everywhere.

The murder of a few usurers brought into force another phenomenon. Moneylenders of Birbhum are mostly pawnbrokers also. In Bolpur, Suri and other places, pawned articles were returned to their owners without any payment, either of principal or interest. In most cases, the owners of the articles came en masse under the leadership of some local ML activists and accepted the articles.

Wine and liquor shops have been closed at Suri, Bolpur, Rampurhat after attacks on them. That does not of course mean that drinking has stopped or for that matter decreased. It has merely greatly encouraged indigenous distillation.

How have all these affected the general public ? The murders coupled with the inability of administration to stop them have completely shaken the confidence of the propertied class in particular and people in general. No murder has been fully investigated. The Naxalites have definitely exposed that at least the present civil administration is a paper tiger. While

the rationale behind a large number of annihilations was appreciated by the poorer section of the people, some murders, particularly those of a few landless labourers, one office peon and a carpenter, have created panic amongst them. No serious attempt has been made to explain these actions and only half-hearted efforts to project these targets as class enemies were made. It is now difficult to find anyone on the streets after dusk. Everybody wants to keep indoors. The desolation of midnight descends in the evening at places like Suri, Rampurhat and Bolpur. The picture in the villages is not different.

Annihilation of some of the dubious class enemies has also raised questions as to why many others eminently meriting annihilation have not even been touched. A good number of businessmen who actually control the business in the district are cited as cases in point. Rumours of protection money are often heard and no serious effort has been made to refute them.

Return of pawned articles by the usurious pawnbrokers has created mixed feelings. Some are happy that they have got back their articles while others look with foreboding to the future. Who will lend them money when they need it even if they want to pawn their articles ? Their want being perpetual, they will often need money. Incidentally, when the most usurious moneylender of Suri fled with all the articles in his custody in two trucks, no one intercepted him. Some of his victims point out in anguish that this was possible because one of his sons is an important Naxalite.

Payments of a monthly levy to the ML activists are fairly common. At least in one case, refusal to pay was countered with physical violence. This has created both resentment, often inarticulate, and submission to the demand of levy.

A word about the composition of the ML activists. Most of them are in their teens, many in fact in their early teens. A very high percentage of them belong to urban centres. Highly mobile and swift, their actions bear the stamp of meticulous planning and perfect training. Politics, unfortunately, is not

one of their strong points and serious, critical discussion with them is often dangerous. One thing which merits mention is that very few of the urban and rural poor have cared to join their ranks as activists. The 'have-nots' have largely ignored their call to join their ranks. The communication gap between the ML on the one hand and the general public on the other is great inasmuch as most annihilations remain unexplained until some wall-writings appear.

Annihilation of class enemies, intimidation of usurious pawnbrokers, and compulsive parting with their wares, demoralisation of the administration and the propertied class, in these the Naxalites have been successful to a large extent. But whether those alone will succeed in breaking the production relation in the district and help to liquidate the rural debt, estimated at about Rs 30 crores, is of course, another matter on which no questions are asked or replies expected.

July 10, 1971

Letters

BIRBHUM

Your two recent reports from Birbhum contradict each other on certain points. While it is perfectly natural for impressions to differ from observer to observer, your second report (by A. B., July 10) is marred by slander of the CPI(ML). Supporters of certain parties proclaim loudly that the Naxalites are helped by the police, that they indulge in anti-social activities, that they are nothing but anti-socials, that they act in collusion with the Congress.

As a resident of Birbhum district and an observer of the upsurge of Naxalite activities from close quarters, I think the two reports fail to highlight the mass popularity the CPI(ML)

is enjoying. One can understand why supporters of other parties talk and write bitterly about the CPI(ML); none of them are known to be able to initiate in this district any activities whatsoever. Newspapers talk of the scare among the general public, but ask any rickshaw-puller or coolie about the Naxalites and they are likely to tell you, "They are the poorman's party. They risk their lives for our sake." Ask a lower middle-class man or woman whether he or she is afraid of the Naxalites and you will often get the reply, "We have nothing to fear. We are poor."

Such stories as the CPI(ML) extracting money from rich people and protecting them in return will not be generally believed by the man in the street in the district. This practice is indulged in by supporters of all other parties in many other parts of West Bengal, but the Naxalites are known, at least in Birbhum, for their purism. There are, no doubt, blackmailers who are extracting money by using the name of the party and there are dacoits plain and simple. But most local people seem to know that the party cadres never resort to such activities. The cadres have done a great deal to keep their image clean by not only putting up posters, issuing pamphlets but also by taking punitive actions against the culprits. Recently peasant cadres of Surul village gunned down two well-known dacoits of a neighbouring village who had for a very long time terrorised the people of the surrounding areas. This action has done a great deal to spread the popularity of the party among ordinary people.

A significant feature of the 'Red Army' actions mentioned in the first report (June 26) is the class composition of the units. These are usually composed of 10 to 20 people, among whom the organising cadres of middle class origin do not exceed 2 or 3. The rest are mainly of landless peasant origin. The guns snatched in the district have reportedly been distributed among these landless peasant cadres. The firing squads that carry out the killings in these village-raids are also composed of these people. The middle-class cadres still use the

knife in preference to the gun ; but the landless peasants seem to be trigger-happy.

Yet another feature of these actions is that the annihilations are done after a trial conducted in public. In many cases, after the trial some were let off with humiliations, while the death sentence was pronounced against others. The raiders may come from outside, but very often the trials have been witnessed by hundreds of villagers who at least passively participated in the trial.

These penal actions of the 'Red Army' are often accompanied by confiscation and distribution of property. The mode of distribution is left to the discretion of a committee of local landless peasants.

It is true that there is an atmosphere of scare, but newspaper reports can easily exaggerate. It is not that shops (other than liquor shops) are closing down, that business (other than of pawnbroking) is coming to a standstill. Many reporters "report" about Birbhum without caring to tour the district ; otherwise how can the reporter of one of our most important English dailies write that five schools at Santiniketan have been burnt, whereas there exists only one school there ? Also absent in Birbhum is the type of scare that affects residents of Baranagore, Dum Dum, Sinthi etc. where one can risk being killed for the mere offence of entering an area not of one's residence. One of the healthier aspects of the conditions in Birbhum is the almost total absence of inter-party killing and murderous clashes between young people of neighbouring areas

A READER
Suri

Thanks are due to the correspondent who has given a detailed report on Naxalite activities in Birbhum. (June 26, 1971). But unfortunately he has failed (willingly or unwillingly) to present these activities in their totality and their implications. It is untrue that these activities cover the whole of Birbhum district. They are mainly limited to Suri, Bolpur, Surul, Ilambazar and Rampurhat areas.

The 'growing support' for the Naxalites mainly comes from the students. The CPI(ML) group is still isolated from its natural ally, the peasantry who cannot even understand the main purpose behind the activities of the Naxalites. I talked with some of the peasants near Bolpur and they were afraid of three things : the police, dacoits and the Naxalites.

Because of this isolation misunderstanding was growing about the Naxalites. For example, on June 29, near Ruppur village (Bolpur P. S.) two young men were brutally killed. One of them Arun Roy Chowdhuri once belonged to the CPI(ML) group but broke away from it in 1969 and owed his allegiance to Asit Sen two months ago and came out of jail on bail only recently. The other man Sader Ali, was an ordinary peasant. Though there is no reason to suppose that they were killed by the CPI(ML), the belief has gained ground that this is their act. They should try to remove the misunderstanding. As your own correspondent has rightly written, "it is not the topography of the country but that of the human mind... which is the foremost precondition of success for a true Marxist party."

A COMMON MAN

July 24, 1971 Santiniketan

The general people—people belonging to the peasantry and low-income groups—welcome the ML activities not so much for the ML slogan of armed revolution but for the fact that everywhere in villages or towns, anti-social hoodlums, various types of exploiters and repressive authorities are frightened after the beginning of CPI(ML) activities. In other words, somehow the CPI(ML) activities have broadly been identified with the *immediate* interests of urban and rural poor. This is particularly true of Birbhum.

Even the privileged people of Santiniketan, (belonging to the so-called Bhadralok class) sometimes sympathise with the activities because they have been making a dangerous journey to achieve something.

August 7, 1971 A MAN OF SANTINIKETAN

LESSONS OF BIRBHUM

PRABIR BASU

Birbhum is now quiet from the law and order point of view. The only news available are of police action against the Naxalites. But there are no reports about Naxalite activities or actions. The army jawans who only a month back were visible almost anywhere in the district have gone back to their barracks. The mobile police vans fill up this vacuum, although indiscriminate police rampage is now only occasional. Plain-clothes and police informers are plentiful and everyone tends to treat the other with mistrust. Local sharks, swindlers and bullies have reappeared in those towns and villages where, frightened by Naxalites, they were so long conspicuously invisible.

Not that there is no killing in Birbhum ; in fact a daily average of three to four is higher than the average during the peak period of the Naxalite movement. Today certainly class enemies are being killed, but killing itself has changed its class character. Now the Naxalites are not killers, they are being killed or murdered by the police or their agents. The news of the killing of Naxals does not get much place in newspapers. Murders at public places in the town areas become news in a fourth-page corner of most newspapers, under the caption "Naxalite killed in action." But news of police murders of Naxalites does not reach even the parents of the victims ; murderers bury the boys with their obituary.

There are resistance groups ('Pratirodh Bahini' is the popular name) organised by the district administration. The sub-divisional police officers have recently held meetings in all the 'troubled areas' in collaboration with the local roughs, and apolitical or political mastans. During the whole of August and September these officers conducted raids, tortures and indiscriminate arrests in their areas in order to force people to

make a choice in favour of the police against the Naxalites. Panic among the people was at that time so high that no one could stay at home at night, no young man could think of not being implicated in cases of arson and murder to be instituted by the police, no middle-aged man could avoid severe beating up in course of interrogations in a police lock-up. A young man, Bhudhar Dalui of Bhubandanga under Bolpur P.S., who had to vomit blood as a result of police beating and had returned from the door of death by sheer luck, is now a 'captain' of eight resistance groups consisting of mostly poor shopkeepers, apolitical students, some Congress (R) people, some day-labourers, poorest employees of governmental or semi-governmental establishments and local roughs and bullies. Local big traders, renowned blackmarketeers, Government contractors and some upper middle-class guys having no ostensible sources of their high income bear the burden of financing the resistance groups' daily performance. There is one 'General' in a police station, and all the area 'captains' work under his direction. The district has a body of 'Generals'. They have to be influential members of the Yuba Congress, if not of the Congress (R). If an alleged 'extremist' is arrested by the resistance group or the police, the relevant 'General' decides whether that extremist should be spared, or imprisoned or murdered. Particularly in middle-class areas a few such so-called 'extremists' are now working with vigour for resistance activities, and others have either been sent to prison or to a place nobody knows.

Not that all the areas of the district have such resistance groups. But it is also true that not all areas were infested with Naxalite activities. The three important towns—Suri, Rampurhat and Bolpur—of the district had seen a brief spell of Naxalite activities, and some villages near them were reported to be their dens. Now the activities of the police and resistance groups are high only in these towns and villages. The villages in the interior are seemingly peaceful and no extremist influence or counter-extremist perversity has as yet touched, reportedly, 70 percent of the villages of the district.

If anybody discovers a close resemblance between the anti-Naxal resistance groups of north Calcutta, Baranagar etc. and those of Birbhum, he will be seriously mistaken. In contrast to Calcutta groups the groups in the district have no dynamism of their own. At least every fourth member of any group—in Bolpur or Suri or Rampurhat is subject to various court cases on common charges of arson, gun-snatching and murder, or on charges of stealing, looting and dacoity. Such a member believes that he will be honourably acquitted of the charges if he serves the resistance group well. A poor old meat-vendor was beaten in Rampurhat police station because in a portion of his mud-walled hut he allowed a family containing some alleged extremist elements to stay. A well-built washerman of Bolpur Dhopapatti was twice interrogated by the police on the charge that some suspected extremist boys had come to his humble cottage for shelter at night. Both the meat-vendor and the poor washerman now serve the resistance groups. On Bolpur School Bagan compound a meeting of the local residents was held under the chairmanship of the District Magistrate. The Sub-divisional police officer warned the people publicly, "We have our men all around. You are well aware that some boys of your locality are renowned for anti-social work. If you do not help us to trace them out, you know the consequences. We know that you are tired of police harrassment. We certainly share your feelings. But we must bring the culprits to book and in this task you can be of great help. If you help, you live in peace ; if you do not cooperate, we shall not be responsible for your peace. The police will take their own measures." The meeting was followed by the formation of resistance groups in the locality. To the common middle-class people the police are a terror to be reckoned with and to avoid that terror, they have to form resistance groups.

The moral of resistance groups has however been steadily sagging. Every night the number of absentees from duties increases if for no other reason than the growing severity of winter. The poor people have no winter clothes and the police

personnel rarely visit the localities where groups are keeping night vigil. It is a matter of time when these resistance groups would cease to function—the time necessary to overcome the shock of severe police beating of the past few months.

It is not known whether the present lull in Naxalite activities is treated by the CPI(ML) cadres as a setback. But to all who saw their almost sudden upheaval in the district from January to September of the year, the Naxalite movement has certainly suffered a setback. About whether the programme of the party was correct or the programme was implemented properly in the light of their field experiences, nobody except the serious activists of the party can say anything positive.

But if you approach an honest middle-class fellow who personally knew X and Y as Naxalite activists, his emotion is likely to overflow if he takes you in confidence.

"I knew X and Y from early days. They were so innocent and sober that you could distinguish them from among a thousand boys of my school. They belong to my district in East Bengal. I doubt whether they had read anything of Mao Tse-tung's work or knew to which district Naxalbari belongs...Fine boys they were. They were of a loving nature and possibly could not hate others before they became Naxals..."—This is the reaction of a middle-aged headmaster of a school on hearing of the death of one Naxalite in a 'police encounter'. He was almost in tears when he narrated how in his brief spell of illness, one of them came to see him at midnight ignoring the risk involved and he turned him out of the house immediately because of his anger over the arson on the school compound only a few days back. "I shall get back the bricks of the school wall, but shall not meet him again," he said.

This is however an emotional out-pouring on personal relationships. But the average middle-class attitude towards the Naxalite movement was never without criticism based on personal difficulties and conveniences. The main reason for this criticism may be that the Naxalites demanded a stern revolutionary attitude and self-sacrifice from this class which the class

was not psychologically or circumstantially prepared for and may never be so except in the final days of the revolution.

Again, the first group of revolutionaries necessarily comes from the middle class—this is the historical fact of any successful revolution the world has hitherto known. Therefore nobody should blame the Naxalites for their class origins. That in Birbhum almost ninety per cent of the cadres of the CPI(ML) in the towns and adjoining areas belonged mainly to the low middle class section of the population should not be a point of criticism against the Naxalites. Real revolutionaries by themselves do constitute a class of socially awakened proletarians. But the main task of the revolution lies in creating revolutionary leadership among the economically proletarian masses. Precisely over this task the CPI(ML) activists did not make an all-out effort.

This is however not to belittle the role the middle class as a class is likely to play in a people's democratic revolution. Indeed, the intensity of the socio-economic crisis is so acute amongst the middle class population, the discontent is such phenomenal even in cities and towns, that the Naxalites—themselves having middle class background—overestimated the capacity of the frustrated middle class for creating the forces of revolutionary consolidation. Not only that, the Naxalite movement itself was blown off its charted track by the gusty wind of amoral middle class discontents. School-burning is a case in point. School-burning might contain elements of a revolutionary moral, indeed a challenge to the rotten educational farce practised in this country, but such acts did not by themselves ensure revolutionary consolidation of middle-class youths. On the contrary, the middle class as a whole reacted unfavourably against its own youths. The need for neutralising the middle class vis-a-vis the Naxalites was seriously impaired by these acts of school-burning or statue-breaking of the petty-bourgeois revolutionary youths. The same was to some extent true of the nature of class annihilations in towns or cities. In many areas, the annihilation programme was not conducted from a

revolutionary proletarian standpoint ; a petty-bourgeois outlook reared its ugly head in many acts of annihilation. The other serious error in the Naxalite movement in towns or cities was almost indiscriminate recruitment of middle-class youths. A revolutionary zeal should not have been the only criterion of recruitment, the qualities of wisdom, tenacity and revolutionary outlook should have been tested again and again in a cadre's practice in the workers' or peasants' base. This was seriously ignored in many areas. On the other hand, in many areas of even Birbhum, some romantic petty-bourgeois youths or opportunistic mastans made their easy way to the party ranks.

All these errors—deadly errors one should say—crept into the movement as such *not because* the Naxalites made some movement in the middle-class areas, *but because* the cadres could not substantially give up their petty-bourgeois outlook and pay heed to the instructions reportedly sent by their leadership and party organs. In other words, a fair number of actions with a petty-bourgeois outlook had so far taken place both in towns and villages although it was feasible for the revolutionaries to stay in towns as much as in villages with a set of actions judiciously conducted from the standpoint of proletarian outlook. It is no doubt true that there is a difference between towns and villages at least in a district like Birbhum where towns lack any production base and townspeople enjoy a kind of parasitic existence on the production base of the villages. Therefore, it is absolutely essential and urgent for cadres of middle-class origin or town origin to develop a set of revolutionaries in the villages from amongst the most exploited sections of the village community tied to the district's production base. Thus, while the main tactical norm required the village to be the base of Naxalite activities, the town acting as the rear, the CPI(ML) movement in Birbhum just did the opposite—opposite to the tactical norm accepted in the party programme. In the case of Calcutta and Howrah, the revolutionaries' penetration into the working class could have been the focal point of their activities and the middle class could act

as the rear, but in practice the opposite took place. Hence the setbacks, both in Calcutta and Birbhum.

Every setback is costly for a party of revolutionaries. The overall setback of the Naxalite movement in terms of loss of lives is incalculable, particularly when we remember their dedication. Every revolutionary is a potential martyr. Every Naxalite martyr loved life more than it deserved, everyone defied death more than his life demanded.

In practice, for the CPI(ML) movement in Birbhum, setbacks were unavoidable, because the movement could not build up a production base under a mass movement of revolutionary peasants in the villages. Wherever mass movements made a headway, they could not consolidate themselves either in terms of production or revolutionary organisation. The exclusive stress on annihilation programmes seriously undermined the essentials of revolutionary consolidation, i.e. (i) formation of peasant committees as an embryo of revolutionary administration and (ii) acceleration and organisation of production in villages as the embryo of a revolutionary economy parallel to their counter-revolutionary counterpart.

Apart from these there were obvious petty-bourgeois deviations in methods of work. When police tortures began, many cadres working among the middle-class population took the latter (in both towns and villages) in good faith. But the maximum police murders of Naxalite cadres took place in middle-class areas because as a class these people could not protect the revolutionaries against the growing severity of police tortures—as a class it lacks the moral fibre to do that—and because its class-depravity (in spite of its socio-economic crisis and frustration) prevents it from committing itself to the cause of revolutionary violence at the initial stage of steady revolutionary movement. At the same time, in the present socio-economic context, revolutionary aspirations may not be lacking in the middle-class, and that makes it an ally of people's democratic revolution. The CPI(ML) in Birbhum, as in many other places, through its actual functioning overestimated the

revolutionary aspirations of the middle class, forgetting its basic petty-bourgeois content and also forgetting the fact that so long as proletarian revolutionary movement does not make a steady advance within the working class and the poor and landless peasantry, the petty-bourgeois revolutionary aspirations of the middle class cannot go beyond the whirlpool of either CPI(M)-brand or the Congress (R)-brand economism and sporadic violence in order to bargain for its class-ends.

What the Naxalite movement has achieved and preserved in arithmetical terms, we do not know. But in qualitative terms it has achieved something, which no left political party could dream of.

That the objective situation in India is fast moving to a revolutionary critical point and that the subjective preparation for revolution is rapidly extending in course of revolutionary practice are evident from the fact that within the first two years of its life the Naxalite movement has brought within its fold thousands and thousands of dedicated young cadres and has challenged the ruling classes and their political henchmen very effectively in different areas of the country. In every area, the movement compelled the ruling classes to use its most efficient organised instruments of violence, the armed forces.

For the first time in India, the Naxalite movement exposed the facts that (i) without the police and the army, the existing state power has no other effective instrument to challenge the emergence of revolutionary movement even of a petty-bourgeois nature, not to speak of that fostered by the peasantry and the working class ; (ii) no parliamentary political party from the Congress (R) to the CPI(M) has the guts to launch stagemanaged mass movement even for pure partial relief, if it is not *a priori* approved by the police and military or if such political shopping is not protected by the police or CRP in the wake of the surging Naxalite movement (in Birbhum, you can now see the old familiar political faces opening their so-long-closed party offices, box collections for parties on the streets, or familiar gesticulations of old leaders in course of their marathon Maidan

lectures or meetings, processions etc.) ; (iii) in India today, no democratic movement or election or any middle-class-oriented movement can sustain itself if it goes beyond the narrow elbowroom provided by ruling class manoeuvres and the much-trumpeted democracy is thrown overboard with the sanction of Parliament the moment the ruling classes feel it necessary to launch neo-fascist attacks on its rival contenders for power ; (iv) with the growing crisis, the exploited sections of the people do have no other choice but to take up arms against the ruling classes in course of their revolutionary movement against intense exploitation and age-old servility.

The Naxalite movement has also taught us that revolution is not fine parliamentary speeches or alert and argumentative debates on the strategy or tactics of the Indian revolution. The more one merely reads and debates the mechanism of revolution, the more stupid and vulgar one becomes to those involved in the actual work of revolution.

The most important contribution of the Naxalite movement in Calcutta, Nadia, Burdwan or Birbhum is that the poor people of the villages or towns have realised that there are people who not only talk of revolution, but work for it by dedicating their priceless lives. Therefore the Naxalite movement will never die, it cannot die and it is bound to have a wider resurgence in the immediate future.

December 18, 1971

Letter

LESSONS OF BIRBHUM

In course of analysing the reasons for the grievous debacle in Birbhum, Mr Prabir Basu has striven to propound a number of profound theses : (1) that there is a revolutionary-proletarian annihilation programme as opposed to a

petty-bourgeois one ; (2) that in a revolutionary-proletarian annihilation programme the middle class cannot be won over as an ally, so it needs to be neutralized ; (3) that polemics on the strategy and tactics of the Indian revolution is stupidity and vulgarity ; the ones "involved in actual work of revolution" know best how to make a revolution (those not engaged in their brands of revolution should shut up their mouths).

Now, what are the content and forms of a "proletarian-revolutionary annihilation programme" ? How and by whom is the programme realized ? These pertinent questions Mr Basu has not cared to answer. Secondly, when he raises the slogan of neutralizing the middle class, he refutes the theory of four-class united front but does not explain why it is necessary to reject it. Thirdly, by ridiculing polemics on strategy and tactics of the Indian revolution, he unmistakably shows himself up as a blind worshipper of empiricism, in Mao's words, a "collaborator and accomplice of doctrinairism" which is alien to Marxism-Leninism.

Who is an empiricist ? As explained by Mao, "...if any comrade experienced in political work rests content with, or still more, rests content solely with his own limited experiences, as though they were dogmas applicable everywhere, if he does not understand or refuses to understand the truth that without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice and that 'in order to lead, one must foresee' and consequently belittles the study of Marxism-Leninism which is a summary of the world's revolutionary experiences, and if he is obsessed with narrow-minded and unprincipled 'pragmatism' and routine activities which require no brain-work and lead nowhere, while sitting on the commander's platform and thoughtlessly styling himself a hero and veteran, and refusing to listen to comrades' criticism or to practise self-criticism—if he does all this, then he becomes an empiricist." ("Our study and the current situation," Peking 1955, pp. 79-80).

DIBAKAR MUKHERJEE
Howrah

January 1, 1972

NAKED TERROR

A CORRESPONDENT

We have received yet another report of cold-blooded murder by the police. Parts of the report are unconfirmed, but they fit perfectly into the general pattern of deliberate police killing which may soon engulf the CPM also.

On the night of Thursday, June 24, the police entered a house in Taltola, forced their way into an inner apartment and came upon three allegedly Naxalite youths who were sleeping there. According to the people of the neighbourhood, the officer asked another member of the raiding party, presumably a spy, "Isn't this Biplab Bhattacharya ?" The spy replied, "Yes." Biplab was immediately shot dead and the other two were taken into custody. Two days later, the papers published a police version of the incident which said that Biplab Bhattacharya was killed when the police were obliged to fire to defend themselves against a bomb attack.

The next day, the hartal day, at about 3 p.m., the East Calcutta Police, completely bypassing the Nadia District Police, came to Kalyani in five Ambassador cars and raided a house in the University Staff quarters area. From the account we got from the Kalyani University staff and from certain people in Beliaghata and Narkeldanga, it would appear that about nine people, including a woman, were rounded up from the house at Kalyani.

To the best of our information, the house in question belongs to a University lecturer who is away in America. It had been turned, obviously with his or the caretaker's consent, into a sort of bachelors' mess where some of the 'daily passengers' among the lecturers and scholars ate and slept casually. Of the arrested, one was a research scholar attached to the Maths Department who used to live there occasionally. Another was a lecturer in Physics who was only a casual visitor and who, we

learnt, was widely admired and respected. Both had decided left sympathies, but neither was ever found associating with political activists of any colour. Another was a University student. They have been refused bail and kept in the Beliaghata police lock-up where at least two of them have been subjected to ruthless torture.

The police are supposed to have arrested five others from the same place—four young men and a woman—all of whom according to the police, were seasoned Naxalites. It is significant that the police caught them on the day following the night on which they had with cool purpose shot Biplab Bhattacharya. Maybe, it was the same spy who guided them to both the places. The police kept these five young people in custody for a couple of days, inflicting every possible torture on them, and then, putting the girl away, allegedly shot them dead with cool deliberation and removed all traces of the murders by burning up the bodies. From what we could gather from sundry folk in Beliaghata and Kalyani, one of these youths murdered by the police was called Kajal, another was Nityagopal, while a third was some Kar. It is widely rumoured in Beliaghata that when the parents of one of these supposedly murdered youths went to the Beliaghata P.S. to make enquiries about their son they were told that their son had been shot dead and his body already burned.

But the brutality of bourgeois terror itself is acting as an added stimulus to action. As terror proceeds it tends to turn stale and goes on losing its edge until it is hardly terror at all. If this were not true, how is it that Naxalbari was succeeded by Srikakulam, Srikakulam by Mushahari and Debra-Gopiballavpur, they in turn by the struggle and repression in Calcutta and the urban areas ? All press agencies report a resurgence of Naxalite activity—more organised than ever—in the hitherto quiet district of Birbhum, while rumour points to a significant upswing of Naxalite combat power in the Bengal-Bihar-Orissa border areas.

July 10, 1971

THE TWO BENGALS

SUMANTA BANERJEE

Events in the two Bengals once again prove the advantages of a parliamentary democracy over military dictatorship for a mature bourgeoisie.

The objective which Yahya Khan wants to achieve through brutal and blatant suppression in the framework of racialism, Mrs Gandhi seeks to gain by a sophisticated combination of cajolery and repression sanctioned by Parliament. In both the Bengals, political stirrings reached a stage where the status quo was threatened. In East Bengal, the movement was primarily nationalistic, led by a rising middle class against the cultural and economic domination of West Pakistan. In West Bengal it was on a different level. The Ruling Congress till the 1971 elections had been losing ground in West Bengal. After the experience of the 1967 and 1969 United Front governments, the Leftist movement had reached a crossroads, veering between the obligation to work according to a moth-eaten Constitution blocking its way to radical reforms and the need to work outside the Constitution and prepare for armed struggle.

The existence of a Constitution, a Parliament at the Centre, a Legislature in the State and a sacrosanct garb clothing them succeeded in dividing the Left in West Bengal. While some sections were lulled into the belief that negotiations and constitutional reforms would lead to socialism, others like the CPI(M) doubted the wisdom of such a policy but could not or would not opt for a more radical policy, and a few other groups notably the CPI(ML) left the mainstream of constitutionalism and chose the path of underground preparations for guerilla warfare.

In East Bengal on the other hand, a clear-cut military dictatorship pursuing an unabashed policy of exploitation with-

out any pretension to democracy succeeded in uniting the majority of the people behind the slogan of autonomy. The military atrocities with the aim of genocide unleased in East Bengal today have left the political elements there with no other option but armed struggle. Compared to the situation in West Bengal, it has therefore been much easier for the East Bengal people to choose the path of armed struggle.

In West Bengal, the Centre followed a policy of selective isolation of a section of the Leftist movement, namely the CPI(M) and CPI(ML) from the rest, by branding them "anti-national elements," "subversive forces" and "anti-constitutionalists" among other things. Yahya Khan's radio broadcast of March 26, after the army crackdown in East Bengal, expresses curiously similar sentiments regarding the Bengali political leaders there. He describes the non-cooperation movement as "an act of treason." He accuses the Awami League workers of defiling the photograph of "the father of the nation," and of creating "turmoil, terror, insecurity and a number of murders." Are not these words reminiscent of Mr Nehru's speeches before ousting the first Communist Ministry in Kerala or of Chavan's numerous utterances against the United Front Ministries in West Bengal ?

But as stated earlier, the Leftist movement in West Bengal was hopelessly divided. The arrogant, big-brother attitude of the CPI(M) during the U.F. regime and the indiscriminate terrorism of the CPI(ML) on the one hand and the policy of capitulation and collaboration of the CPI on the other, helped the Centre to isolate the middle-class population of Calcutta and turn them away from the Communists in 1971 elections.

A brief review of the present situation in West Bengal would reveal that the Centre is pursuing a policy of emasculating the militant section of the Leftist movement. Through military combing operations in urban and rural areas, the people, particularly the peasants in the countryside, are being disarmed of even the most primitive weapons of resistance like *ramdao* or axes. The Centre is trying to avoid a situation

where it might have to fight with an armed population, as is happening in East Bengal today. The youth wing of the Congress (R) is emerging as a paramilitary organization like the Nazi storm troopers, and would be utilized at the appropriate time to carry out unofficially the dirty job of lynching the Communists. No one would be able to accuse the Centre then of using the military against political workers, as is happening in East Bengal. The Indian Government's added advantage lies in the legislative sanction obtained now for preventive detention which has empowered it with the right of indiscriminate arrests of activists of the militant Leftist parties. Thus, a virtual military rule in West Bengal will masquerade as President's rule.

The CPI(M) appears to be a helpless spectator to these events. Without any appropriate underground organisation or preparations for armed struggle, it appears to have been caught unawares by the subtle manoeuvres of Mrs Gandhi. Isolated from the other Leftist parties, it is unable to launch a united movement against the present Central policy towards West Bengal. If this drift continues, a second Indonesia will be re-enacted in West Bengal, with the only difference that the military coup will have the blessing of Parliament and a massacre can be avoided by preventive detention and selective assassination of party activists.

Thus, by following a calculated strategy and being well-prepared in advance, Mrs Gandhi hopes to forestall the mess that Yahya Khan has got himself into in East Bengal.

The influx of refugees from East Bengal has posed a new situation. In the absence of a Leftist leadership, the influx may as well lead to communal tensions in some areas. Stray incidents have already taken place in the border areas. A communal riot at this stage might come in handy for the Centre to bring the military directly into the scene.

From all indications, the period of parliamentary struggles seems to be coming to an end in West Bengal. No elections would lead to a stable government. The CPI(M) is in com-

mand of a relatively well-organized mass movement. Will it allow its cadres to be eliminated ? It is as yet undecided over the next phase of the struggle. Will it be a combination of parliamentary struggle and underground preparations for insurrection ? A complete departure from constitutional movements will involve a change of strategy, tactics, propaganda, organisational machinery and so on, for which the CPI(M) is not yet prepared.

The only armed underground Leftist force in West Bengal are the Naxalites. They had the foresight to realize as early as 1967 the inevitability of armed struggles and started preparing for guerilla warfare.

But it is to be seen how well prepared they are to survive a direct military take-over. It is one thing to finish off political rivals or a lonely policeman in a desolate corner or among a crowd of unarmed terrorised spectators, and quite another to withstand military operations, the like of which we are witnessing in East Bengal.

Judging from their statements, the CPI (ML) leadership hopes to combine the struggles in East and West Bengal. By "struggles" they mean the nascent peasant movement in East Bengal and not the present "liberation movement." A clandestinely published copy of *Deshabrati* of March 20 said : "...in East Bengal too, under the leadership of the Marxist-Leninist Communist party, armed peasant struggle has begun in the countryside and the possibility of the unity of two Bengals has arisen. To retard its progress, Mujibur and his Awami League have taken the path of uniting the two Bengals in an imperialist way and in imperialist interests."

Leaving aside the merits or demerits of such an assessment, one must concede however that the CPI(ML) has been generally right in its reading of the situation in West Bengal. Its aim was to reduce parliamentary democracy to a farce and render it unworkable. It has succeeded in doing it in West Bengal. It sought to bring the repressive machinery of the State to the forefront. The gradual de-democratization of the

system in West Bengal and the possibility of virtual military rule in the State have combined to create exactly the situation which the CPI(ML) has been wanting. Combating the idea that the struggle in India would be a short one, the CPI(ML) has been consistently preaching the theory of a protracted war continuing for decades. From the recent experience in East Bengal and an inkling of the shape of things to come in West Bengal, it appears that this region of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent is destined for a slow grinding process of armed struggle.

July 10, 1971

DUM DUM JAIL MASSACRE : A CASE STUDY

A CORRESPONDENT

The Naxalites are said to look upon the Dum Dum incident of May 14 as something unusual, both for the number of people killed and the daring and organisation involved in the escape attempt.

May 14 was an interview day. As usual, at 5-23 p.m. the three groups of Naxalite prisoners went outside the railing to collect their rations, coal and firewood for the next day. At about the same time, following the daily schedule, the 200 odd lunatic patients, who are under treatment in Dum Dum jail, were being shifted from the cells to their barracks outside the railing. Naturally, the gate had to be opened. Two of the prisoners suddenly jumped on the gate-warder and snatched his whistle to prevent an early warning to the sentries. Two nearby warders met with the same fate. Almost simultaneously, another group of ten boys lifted the 14-ft-high gate from its open-type hinges and carried it to the 16-ft-high outer wall and then rested the gate against the wall, to use it as a make-shift ladder. All this happened within a split second. Naxalite prisoners from nearby cells crossed the railing and

started scaling the wall in batches. As the first batch of seven just jumped outside, the whistle of an onlooking warder blew out as the first alarm. This was followed by a chorus of whistles from the warders and then finally the jail alarm started howling. The warders posted along the jail wall started running wildly. The armed sentries from outside rushed to the spot and started firing indiscriminately. The crowd around the gate dispersed and the sentries lowered the gate to the ground. By that time, at least 50 had made good their escape.

The place instantly turned into a battlefield. On one side there were the sentries and warders armed with iron rods and long sticks, their ranks swelled by that section of the convicts who act as henchmen of the jail administration ; on the other side were about 150 Naxalite prisoners, most of them mere schoolboys, completely unarmed. At first, the boys tried to put up some resistance by throwing chunks of coal from the nearby stock. But they had to give up against heavy odds. The jail bloodhounds made a festival of the situation at the instigation of the Jailor. They started swinging their rods and long sticks at the unarmed boys.

The jail creatures then rushed into the cells and dragged many a prisoner out to start it all over again. Fortunately, some of the cells were locked as soon as the chaos started—a judicious action on the part of the sympathetic section of the warders.

While the boys outside were dying, their compatriots inside the cells shouted slogans condemning the cowardly action. Some knocked their heads against the walls, some tried in vain to force open the cell doors while others waited in utter impotence. They were joined in their condemnation of those atrocities by thousands of ordinary prisoners, who were full of wrath against the inhumanity of it all.

Meanwhile, those who were talking to their relatives in the interview room were dragged out and mercilessly beaten in front of their nearest ones. The relatives and friends were also manhandled and physically forced out of the jail gate, lest

they add to the number of witnesses to this unheard of blood-bath.

Around 8 p.m., the jail alarm was stopped. Only now it occurred to the butchers that some sort of first-aid should be given to the half-dead. They dragged the unconscious bodies lying on the ground to the jail hospital and stacked them on the verandah. Bodies from all corners of the jail compound were brought in. The doctor in charge of the night shift fainted. The convict-compounders shuddered at the sight of the mutilated bodies. The attackers started beating those who were still groaning or murmuring in delirium. This was too much for the compounders. They protested but were silenced when threatened with the same fate. Some of the dying men were groaning for water. The thugs offered to urinate on their gaping mouths.

Even these brutes at last felt tired and left the place. The doctors made a frantic appeal to the jail authorities to arrange immediate removal of all the injured to outside hospitals, on an emergency footing. This was rejected. However, on the insistence of the doctors the jail authorities at last agreed to shift some of the patients, but not all. The doctors were asked to select about 30 of the most injured from among 150. Finally 37 cases were sent to outside hospitals as late as 3 a.m.

Meanwhile, of the 50-odd prisoners who had managed to escape, the last batch of eight were captured by the warders from nearby quarters alerted by the jail alarm. By the time they were brought inside the jail compound two of them had died. The rest were dragged to the hospital verandah.

Of those who were admitted to outside hospitals many died the same night, while some died the following day. The total number of deaths that could be accounted for rose to 32, contradicting the official figure of 17. No one except the jail authorities knows what happened to the 15 unaccounted for corpses. Perhaps the long-abandoned No. 10 cell and the garbage dump behind the hospital building may provide an answer. The following morning, this dump was found filled

up. One point of interest is that all the deaths occurred as a result of intensive beating and none of the bodies bore bullet injuries.

On the 15th morning, hundreds of relatives and friends of the Naxalite prisoners gathered in front of the jail gate. At last a representative fraction of them were allowed inside the jail. But this could not solve the problem of identification of the dead and even of some of the still unconscious boys. Many of the bodies were heaps of flesh and broken bones. The jail authorities asked the Naxalite prisoners to identify their comrades. But it was a most difficult task even for those who had shared the same cell with the dead. Of course the jail authorities found a novel way of accounting for the undeclared deaths, by putting the number of fugitives at an unknown X. Thus they were able to deceive many a relative.

During the jail-break the Naxalites did not inflict any physical injury on the warders (the press report that a large number of warders were severely injured has no basis at all). Most of those who actively participated in the massacre were non-Bengalis having no social bonds with the locality. There exists a sharp contradiction between the Bengali and non-Bengali warders, which is utilised by the jail authorities to their own advantage.

Finally, the jail authorities utilised a section of criminal convicts in the massacre, which was against the law.

The participants in the massacre were a fascist squad carefully nurtured to cope with such eventualities. In fact, this faction controls everything inside the jail world.

Those who participated in the May 14 massacre did not behave in the heat of the moment. Rather, everything they did was calculated and were for the satisfaction of their perverse sadistic mental set-up.

July 17, 1971

Andhra Pradesh

THE DEATH SENTENCE

A CORRESPONDENT

A division bench of the Andhra Pradesh High Court confirmed recently the death sentence passed on the Marxist-Leninist party leader and lawyer of Orissa, Mr Nagabhushanam Patnaik, by the Additional Sessions Judge, Visakhapatnam. The division bench was disposing of the appeals filed by the accused against their conviction and also by the State against the acquittal of some of the accused.

It was alleged by the prosecution that all the accused formed into an unlawful assembly and murdered Mr Poosalapati Appala Narasimha Raju in May 1969. The Additional Sessions Judge, Visakhapatnam, who tried the case, convicted and sentenced Messrs Nagabhushanam Patnaik, Nagella Sekhar alias Chitti Babu, Gatta Paidaiah and M. Lakshmana to death. He convicted and sentenced Mr Choudhary Tejeswara Rao, another top Marxist-Leninist party leader, and seven other accused to life imprisonment, and acquitted six other accused.

The division bench, however, modified the death sentence passed on Mr Nagella Sekhar alias Chitti Babu and Mr Lakshmana to life imprisonment. M. Lakshminarayana Rao alias Narayana was acquitted.

Their lordships observed that the determination of the sentence undoubtedly called for an assessment of the record of the offender with reference to his education, home life, sobriety, social adjustment, his emotional and mental condition and the prospects of rehabilitation and the possibility of his return to a normal life in the community.

Their lordships said : "The appellants, in our opinion, urge as extenuation for their act that their political philosophy is borne out of a passionate desire for a better or equitable order of society and that their act is the outcome of that creed".

The ancient concept of regarding as abhorrent the killing of people for the achievement of political objectives had no place in the present context, their lordships said. But the view that political necessity or conviction, as conceived by the offender, went in extenuation of the act of killing was a doctrine fraught with dangerous consequences.

"We cannot endorse the view that where a murderer asserts that 'the dictates of his conscience' impelled him to kill another person, a case is ipso facto made out for the lesser sentence. Human life can no more be sacrificed at the altar of one's political ideals than it can be at the altar of religion. There is as little justification for the one as for the other."

Commenting on the statements made by the accused, their lordships added that a perusal of the statements recorded in this case, running to over 767 pages of printed matter, revealed that there had been a total distortion of the procedural provisions of the law intended to enable the accused to explain any circumstances appearing in the evidence against them.

In this connection it will be interesting to make note of another judgment delivered earlier in another murder case.

This judgment, in the Nellore Naxalite Case, was delivered by a division bench of the Andhra Pradesh High Court consisting of Mr Justice O. Chinnapa Reddy and Mr Justice A. D. V. Reddy.

In this case the three accused, who were alleged to be Naxalites, had been convicted by the Sessions Judge, Nellore, on a charge of having murdered Venkata Reddy at his house at Maddurapalli in Venkatagiri Police Station limits in Nellore District in May 1970.

The Sessions Judge, Nellore, sentenced Mr Intha Ramana Reddy, and Mr Puli Srinivasulu to death and Mr Ramaraju for life.

The first two had refused to appeal against the judgment as they had "no faith or confidence in the present system or procedure". They had also not taken advantage of the facility to defend themselves before the Magistrate who committed the

case to the sessions and the Sessions Judge or the High Court. However, Mr Sankepalli Ramaraju, who was sentenced for life, filed the appeal in the High Court through his counsel.

The division bench took the unusual step of recalling and examining the material witnesses in the High Court. (Normally examination of witnesses does not take place in the High Court.) But Mr Justice O. Chinnapa Reddy and Mr Justice A. D. V. Reddy who constituted the division bench took this decision in view of the fact that they "are presented with a difficult problem and faced with a strange situation, quite unprecedented, arising out of an unusual attitude adopted by the accused who, quite unmindful of the serious charge of murder against them, refused to participate in the proceedings before the lower court and persist in their refusal in this court also. In the committal court as well as in the Court of Sessions, when examined by the presiding officers, the accused plainly and bluntly stated that they 'had no faith in the law courts of the land,' as according to them they 'were established to protect the interests of the landlords, capitalists and the like.' "

The division bench also observed that the "Sessions Judge had adopted a negative and passive attitude at the trial. It was as if he was a spectator and not a participant in the trial. In a case where the charge was of capital nature and where the accused are undefended, be it by choice, one would expect the presiding judge to evince an active interest and participate in the trial by putting questions to witnesses in order to ascertain the truth." The bench held that the Sessions Judge had not done so.

Their lordships said that every criminal trial was "a voyage of discovery in which truth is the quest. It is the duty of a presiding judge to explore every avenue open to him in order to discover the truth. In a case which required watchfulness and alacrity on the part of the presiding judge there was but a mechanical recording of evidence".

The High Court referred to Article 21 of the Constitution, which said, "no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law."

In conclusion, the division bench held that in the circumstances of the case it did not think it would be justified in quashing the conviction and ordering a retrial. "We think that the interests of justice will be adequately served if, in exercise of our power under Section 375 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, we recall and examine the material witnesses ourselves by putting necessary questions. On such an examination the accused will naturally have a right to even examine the witnesses if they choose and the prosecution will have a right to re-examine the witnesses."

The division bench therefore summoned nine witnesses and examined them.

At one stage, Mr Justice O. Chinnapa Reddy asked the accused whether they would like to cross-examine the witnesses. The accused, Mr Ramana Reddy, said that "since these law courts are intended to protect the interests of the landlords and the capitalist classes we do not have faith in them."

After the examination of witnesses was over Mr Ramana Reddy made a lengthy statement on their political stand.

Their lordships in their judgment reduced the death sentence on Mr Intha Ramana Reddy and Mr Puli Srinivasulu to one of imprisonment for life. The life sentence passed on Mr Sankepalli Ramaraju was confirmed.

Their lordships in their judgment said : "Both of them (Mr Ramana Reddy and Mr Srinivasulu) professed to be Naxalites. They appear to labour under the sincere belief that organised violence in rural areas directed against rich landlords labelled by them as the enemies of the people, will soon lead to insurrection and revolution and thereafter, to the abolition of all inequality and to the happiness, prosperity and peace of all the people of India. While it is true on the one hand that the accused killed an innocent person who had done them no harm, it must also be borne in mind, on the other hand, that they did not act out of any personal motive, but out of what they conceived to be a public motive. They had no personal animosity against the deceased and they sought no personal gain."

"The means of murder employed by the accused as a step to achieve their ultimate goal was certainly blameworthy, but it can not be said that their motive, according to their conception, was a low or mean motive. While it is necessary to recognise that the dictates of conscience which led to injury to other may also merit severe punishment sometimes, it is also necessary to recognise that people acting out of genuine and passionate motives, according to their conscience, do not merit extreme punishment. In that view we think that the sentences of death passed on accused 1 (Mr Ramana Reddy) and 2 (Mr Srinivasulu) must be set aside. Instead we sentence each of them to suffer imprisonment for life."

Soon after the delivery of the judgment by the Additional Sessions Judge, Visakhapatnam, sentencing Mr Nagabhusanam Patnaik and three others to death, the Sarvodaya leader, Mr Jaya Prakash Narayan appealed to the President to condone the death sentences. He also appealed to the Prime Minister and leaders of opposition parties to give serious thought to the whole issue of capital punishment and agree to exempt political offenders from the ambit of death sentences. Perhaps, he said, they (Mr Patnaik and others) would be the first political offenders in independent India to be sentenced to death. He was not prepared to "lump them together with ordinary criminals".

Leaders of many political parties and organisations are coming forward with appeals to the President to commute the death sentence passed on Mr Patnaik. They include 20 MLAs of Orissa, among whom are Messrs Harekrushna Mahtab, former Chief Minister of Orissa, Prasanna Kumar Das, PSP leader, Vinayak Acharya, Congress leader and Gangadhar Payake, CPI leader. Two CPM MLAs have also joined the appeal.

July 24, 1971

New Delhi

"DIALOGUE" WITH NAXALITES

S. R.

In a span of a little over five months of its existence the new Government at the Centre has made two announcements of its attitude towards the Naxalites. The first announcement came from the President himself. In his address to a joint session of the two Houses of Parliament on March 23, he expressed 'the Government's determination to root out lawlessness and to eliminate the politics of murder.' This was a part of his declaration of the policy objectives of the new Government that took office after the mid-term Lok Sabha poll. It hinted at the possibility of bringing into operation the supreme coercive power of the bourgeois state. This coercion was to come in the name of democracy, for the President himself said that 'the conduct and results of the recent elections in West Bengal clearly indicated a reaffirmation by the people of their faith in democracy.'

The second announcement was made by Mr K. C. Pant, Minister of State for Home Affairs. On July 21, he told the Lok Sabha that the Government was willing to have a 'dialogue' with the Naxalites. He said, 'It is the responsibility of all of us to carry on such a dialogue and help them see the path of reason and restore their belief in democratic processes.' He expressed concern over the present state of West Bengal, where, when a crime was committed none came forward to give evidence because of the prevailing terror. Three days later Mr Pant elaborated on his stand. He said that his ideas about the 'dialogue' with the Naxalites did not connote discussions at a conference table, but it was a persuasive process to win away non-committed elements among extremists. He did not subscribe to the theory of 'once a Naxalite, always a Naxalite.' He would not 'lump together' all those who go

by the name Naxalite, because they vary from confirmed Maoists to anti-social elements and misguided youths. The misguided teen-agers are amenable to 'reformatory efforts' and they must be exposed to 'processes of reason.' He discarded the 'negative law and order concept' in his dealing with those who were not confirmed hard-boiled Maoists. "The Naxalites' approach is that of force and coercion", said Mr Pant. "Our approach should be to persuade and convince." "It is a question of total approach."

Mr Pant's first statement of July 21 sounds vague and contradicted the spirit of the policy enunciated by the President. Ever since the new Government came to power at the Centre, the bureaucracy had been following their old policy of crude repression in their dealing with the Naxalites. They were happy that the Presidential mandate reiterated their stand. To them, Mr Pant's statement was a bolt from the blue. The *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (July 22 & 23) came out as the spokesman of the bureaucratic reaction. As per these reports, the high officers of the bureaucracy were struck by the sudden 'softening' of the Government stand towards the Naxalites. They raised the following questions :

(i) What is the exact Government stand towards the Naxalites ?

(ii) The Naxalite leaders were under warrants of arrest. What would the police do if some of them come forward to hold talks with the Government ?

(iii) Does the Central Government regard the Naxalites as a legal party ?

(iv) How is it possible for the Central Government to come to a political understanding with those who stand for the liquidation of their class enemies ?

Two important questions emerge from this : One, what led Mr Pant to announce a relaxation of the Government stand on repression ? Two, is it relaxation at all ?

Taking it to be a relaxation it can be easily accounted for. The old technique of unalloyed repression has reached

its strategic stalemate. The people in towns and cities (take for example, Calcutta, Burdwan, Birbhum, Midnapur and 24 Parganas) where the coercion of the bourgeois State has descended with maximum ferocity, are tired of the vulgarities in social life. A few weeks ago *Jugantar* reported that the people of Birbhum were scared of the police. The terrible police actions in some parts of Calcutta (like Tollygunj, Behala, Beliaghata) and 24 Parganas (like Dum Dum, Barasat, Asoke Nagar, Belghoria) have led to mass evacuation. The real value of property has gone down, thereby affecting the lesser wing of the property-owning section of the middle class. The people at large prefer to be under the regional dominations of one party than to be under the protection of the police.

In this context the peace feeler of the Government is understandable. The Government must win over the middle class. Fascism subsists on the support of this class when it is perverted. A frustrated middle class was the springboard of fascism that rocked Europe prior to the Second World War. This support in India has been camouflaged under many august expressions, the latest being the "people's mandate." A *Statesman* report of July 28 said that on the preceding day the Rajya Sabha was rocked over the West Bengal issue. Mr Chandra Sekhar categorically said, "We have not understood the realities in the State (West Bengal) and have turned our face from them", "the West Bengal youth is no less patriotic than young men in other parts of the country. We have failed in our duty by them."

The fine gestures are expected to galvanize the middle class. Boys from this class have swelled the ranks of the urban guerillas. Therefore this class must be prevented from drifting into the political orbit of revolution. Mr Pant said, "Ultimately we have to create a public opinion and the dialogue is directed towards that end."

Any relaxation of repression is mere window dressing. How many murders in jails have recently taken place ? Even

when Mr K. C. Pant was making his peace gesture, a serious tragedy took place in the Hazaribagh jail. On July 22, Mr Pant was requested by some members of the Parliament to release Naxalites from prison in Andhra Pradesh so that they could counteract the Naxalite movement. He pointblank refused to comply with the request. The issue of release of Naxalites was left to the State Government. Recently, spokesmen of the Central Government reiterated more than once their decision to overhaul the administrative and police machinery in the country. The Government of West Bengal has already acted to that end by replacing moderate police officers of Birbhum by tough guys. On July 28, Mr Pant said in Parliament that all possible steps, "preventive as well as penal", were being taken to restore normal conditions. Mr Pant said that 87 companies of CRP had been made available to the West Bengal Government so far and they were stationed in the State for law and order duties. Besides, the Eastern Frontier Rifles, of which the State Government has 12 companies, were functioning as the State Government's own police force. The expenditure on the forces made available to the West Bengal since the proclamation of President's Rule was approximately Rs. 42 lakhs (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, July 29). The Government has already undertaken a project for the expansion of the police force in the country. Recently Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi announced that the police department of the State will absorb 16,000 'unemployed' youth. Any one can guess what colossal dimensions the police force would assume when these 16,000 youths swell the ranks of those that are already there. On top of all these there will be private armies raised from the civilians in the form of resistance groups and in other shapes.

Side by side with this huge expansion of the police machinery the Government is seeking to disarm people (as envisaged in the 11-point charter prepared by the State Government to end unrest) and to amend the Constitution so as to invest the Government with absolute emergency powers. This is typical

of the growth of emergency politics on which fascist State subsists. It means that a vast and irresistible machinery of repression will have full play on the inoffensive base of a disarmed society.

A state of emergency has already descended on different parts of the country signifying a recession in democracy. Brutality and terror has been made the foundation of the State.

August 14, 1971

Bihar

THE HUNTING HOUNDS

N. K. SINGH

Bihar has been proved to be closely following the pattern set up by the West Bengal ; jail killings have started here too. But, thank God, the iron has not yet entered the soul of Biharis and there was much hue and cry—termed by a local newspaper as "public resentment"—over the firing in Patna Jail on July 7 and Hazaribagh Jail on July 25 in which 2 and 17 prisoners were killed respectively. At both these places the killings were attributed to alleged "jail-breaking" attempts by the Naxalite prisoners.

In Patna Jail there was a scuffle between prisoners and the jail staff over the death of a convict—described by the jail officials as a suicide case. However, it was alleged in the Assembly that the convict did not kill himself. Following the death of the fellow prisoner, the prisoners, in a riotous mood, allegedly damaged the official records, burnt the grain godown, damaged the central observation tower and ransacked the carpentry and iron-smithy shops of the jail. In the melee ten prisoners, including five Naxalites escaped. (Later on, a wall-poster claimed that "they are safe among the masses.")

Indiscriminate firing started (about 150 rounds were fired) in which two prisoners were killed and 42 wounded. And as usual, the prisoners—especially the Naxal boys—were taught a good lesson.

There was a heated discussion in the State Assembly and the Chief Minister was compelled to order a judicial inquiry into the episode.

But what happened in Hazaribagh Central Jail on the evening of July 25 was a case of "cold blooded murder"—as a Patna daily called it. The newspaper commented : "It is for the first time in Independent India that so many prisoners have been killed in a firing inside the jail without any policemen or warder or any other jail official losing his life. It is also significant that no prisoner escaped from the jail. No gate was broken. There is no indication that any damage was done to the jail walls."

The story, as gathered from various sources, goes like this : At about three p.m. some Naxalites attempted to break out. According to the jail officials they exploded 15 bombs—later the number was brought down to a reasonable four—in their bid to escape. They were fired upon which quelled them down. But this was not enough. The jail authorities let loose the hardened criminals supported by warders on the Naxalites. This, said the Deputy Commissioner of Hazaribagh, was in accordance with Rule 366 of the Jail Manual according to which "the convict prisoners could assault fleeing prisoners to maintain discipline within the jail premises. They could even use weapons except firearms to face such a situation".

Later, the preliminary inquiry conducted by the same D.C. revealed that 13 Naxalites died as a result of the operation of Rule 366 of the Jail Manual. The report said that only 4 out of the 17 Naxalites killed died in the firing and the remaining 13 from "other types of injuries caused by convicts and officers." So the 109 rounds fired in the jail proved less fatal than Rule 366 of the Jail Manual. A deeper inquiry into the episode confirms this opinion. All the 27 injured Naxal pri-

soners undergoing treatment in the jail hospitals had received bullet injuries. It means that all those who had received "other types of injuries caused by convicts and officers" died instantaneously.

The Chief Minister, Mr Bhola Paswan Shastri, after visiting the jail for 90 minutes came to the unavoidable conclusion that the prisoners deserved to be murdered by the jail authorities. Congratulating those criminals who helped the authorities in "quelling the Naxalite attempt," he further disclosed that his Government was thinking of rewarding these 'lawful' criminals. He ordered two official inquiries—one by the Commissioner of Chotanagpur and other by Mr S. V. Sohni, additional member of the Board of Revenue—both of almost the same rank.

What the outcome will be of the official inquiry—being held "in camera"—in the light of the Chief Minister's unequivocal verdict—the firing is "certainly justified"—can be easily imagined.

August 28, 1971

West Bengal

COSSIPORE-BARANAGAR

A CORRESPONDENT

What appeared in the newspapers about the Baranagar-Cossipore killing of August 12-13 was but a small part of what actually happened. The press reports were police reports. But what happened would be beyond any one's conprehension. Murder of sorts is a familiar thing now-a-days. But the Baranagar-Cossipore carnage was neither familiar nor secret. It has broken new grounds and set a new pattern with the most ominous sign of the shape of things to come. So long the police would come to the house of a Naxalite suspect, ransack

the house and if he happened to be there, drag him out. They would not make any charge, would produce no warrant and would not answer any question. The day following, there would appear in the press a spoof about a bomb attack on the police or an attempt to escape and about the death of the boy. But this time it was entirely novel. More than 150 boys were butchered within two days—the Friday-Saturday. Others who were not young had also to die. Lest there be any mistake, a list containing the names of the boys killed was hung up on an improvised scaffolding on Kutighat Road, the main road connecting the Baranagar police station with the other parts. There were hour-to-hour additions to the list, and the list covered only a part of the whole area of operations. The list ran to more than 60 names on Friday alone, and enlisting the dead was discontinued as the dead were lost count of.

The boys were murdered because they were nonconformists and Naxalites. Not all of them were activists ; indeed very few of them were activists. Some were friends ; many were neighbours ; others happened to have talked to some of them once or twice.

The big business concerns (there are quite a few at Baranagar), the shopkeepers and the local political leaders were feeling uneasy. On the day preceding the mass murder, one Congress (R) worker who ran a club of local roughs was killed. The anti-socials became panicky ; they got the green signal from the high ups in the Government. The police were officially withdrawn and given the strictest instruction not to interfere. Practitioners in murder and mayhem were brought in, arms were supplied, the operation started. It started in broad daylight. Lest there be any doubt about the police inaction and connivance, it may be pointed out that at least 3 murders were committed right in front of a three-storeyed building housing a large contingent of armed police at Kutighat Road, about half a furlong away from the Baranagar police station. Who were the killers ? They are now euphemistically called "resistance groups". They are contro-

lling the area at the moment. They get protection money from the business houses ; they extort money from the people on the plea of defending the locality ; they are on the pay-roll of the police for supplying intelligence about the Naxalites. But actually who are they ? They are gangsters and murderers. Only the other day it was their daily practice to snap and steal overhead copper wires plunging whole areas into darkness. One of the members of the "resistance groups" had his left hand chopped off at the wrist in the process. The killers are at large. They are reigning at Baranagar.

It was a bloody sadistic settling of accounts. Dead bodies were everywhere—bodies with head cut off, limbs lost, eyes gouged out, entrails ripped open. They were there in the streets in broad daylight. Later they were carried in rickshaws and handcarts and thrown into the Hooghly. The tidal bore came in handy ; the bodies were washed away. Murders of the most grisly kind were perpetrated ; the most ghastly tortures were inflicted. Only two of the countless are being cited. An old man above 60 was literally doused with petrol and burnt alive because he had failed to give news about his alleged Naxalite nephew. A school girl in her early teens had her arm chopped off because she did not know where her brother was. More apologetic crimes like the burning of houses, kicking and punching people to senselessness, etc. need not be mentioned.

The Baranagar-Cossipore killing was a practice in systematic brutality. A macabre drama was enacted in the wake of the killing. It took shape in the cool, comfortable Rotunda of Writers' Buildings.

There was a hurried conference of political parties presided over by the killer party. There were hot words, angry words, ambiguous words all around. Mr Jyoti Basu of the CPM threatened a *bandh* over the issue. But there was no *bandh*. There simply could not be any. The Baranagar people know that the CPM cadres who had in the past made a strategic retreat from the area of operation, presumbly due to the Congress threat were allowed to come back and they helped

the Congress (R) killers flush out the extremists. Thus when the Left leaders made the angry protest the people of Baranagar were not amused ; they felt sick. In fact the "wicked Naxalites" are the common enemy. Mr S. S. Ray visited Baranagar on Sunday and was conducted to the places of incidents by the killers themselves. (There was not any visit from the Left.) The meeting at Rotunda (the same day) was a few minutes late (shouldn't the visit precede the meeting ?) ; a Commission was announced ; the Left leaders understood and the bandh call was not pressed ; a resolution (yes, a resolution) was passed condemning the murders. *Requiescat et peace.* The ominous sign is the exhibition of total hypocrisy on the part of the political leaders. The killers, much like the facist storm-troopers, themselves played the hoax and organised student strikes etc. here and there in protest against the killing. The killing is continuing, albeit with a different intensity and on a different scale.

Fascism is not a figure of speech, it is a grim reality. Baranagar is not an isolated incident ; it is openly said there that a repeat performance will be given sometime somewhere.

September 18, 1971

Letters

SAROJ DATTA MURDERED

A leaflet condemning the news of the death of Saroj Datta, Secretary, P.C. of the CPI(ML), was published by an Area Committee of the party. It is stated there that he was arrested and shot dead by the police on the night of August 4, 1971.

The administration and the police have not confirmed either his arrest or his death. The newspapers are maintaining a mysterious silence.

October 16, 1971

A CITIZEN

DIABOLICAL OMISSION

News agencies operating in West Bengal are reporting a decline in violence. Do the figures include all the casualties for instance, those inflicted by the State Police, the Central Reserve Police, the Centre's Secret Service personnel and the Armed Force jawans engaged in combing not 'merely' "Naxalite" dens but also campuses and hostels of the Jadavpur and Visva-Bharati universities ? It is a diabolical piece of omission to put the reading public in blinkers, and hide the facts of genocidal killing indulged in by the redoubtable roughnecks of the Congress (R) in Cossipore-Baranagar.

R. P. MULLICK
Lucknow

November 6, 1971

ATROCITIES IN PUNJAB

Two college students in tehsil Batala (Punjab) were arrested and shot dead before a large number of people. They were suspected to be Naxalites but had not been tried in any court. All the political parties, students and trade union leaders demanded a judicial inquiry but the State Government was silent.

In another incident, in tehsil Barnala, the police tortured an entire village, criminally assaulted the womenfolk, destroyed property and crops. All this was done to arrest an alleged Naxalite.

The Punjab police interrogate the intelligentsia including university teachers and writers, search their houses, take away their belongings and harrass them in whatever manner it thinks proper. Many teachers, writers, students and trade union leaders have been implicated in false cases.

On October 31, some 500 Punjabi writers took out a procession at Jullundur protesting against police atrocities. The bourgeois press did not find it worth publishing.

S. S. DOSASJ
Organising Secretary,
Kendri Panjabi Lekhak Sabha
Jullundur.

December 4, 1971

The Punjab police are killing the revolutionaries and alleged Naxalites in fabricated "encounters"—not all reported in the press. Many are arrested because the Government 'thinks' that they are extremists. These days there are disputes between agricultural workers and farmers over wage rates. Recently five young Harijan workers were killed by the farmers but the police have not registered any case. Rural Congressmen (many rich, of course) are writing to the Chief Minister and police officials about young men in rural areas, who are 'provoking' the agricultural workers to demand higher wages ; they are Naxalites and this or that area is not 'safe'. University campuses and colleges are under close watch. The Government instructions to the Vice-Chancellors are : save the universities from leftist political influence or close them down or inform the Government about teachers and students with leftist leanings. Many leftist students are being refused admission to the next higher classes. And interestingly, one rural young man (progressive, but not Naxalite) who went to a CPI MLA (Chandigarh-based) with a complaint about police harrassment, got the answer : "Oh, police dare to do this ! I will take you to the CM, Gianji is very generous."

BHARTI
Jullundur

July 28, 1973

Comment

A CASE FOR INQUIRY

A rebel alive is a CIA agent, a rebel dead is a cherished hero. Charu Majumdar would have scoffed at the paeans that might be sung of him after his death in police custody much in the same way he had spurned the politics of the parties approved by the establishment. In death he has triumphed, for it was a master-stroke to confound and humiliate his detractors who had been speculating since his arrest on 16 July whether the police had taken their protege under their protective wings. The need for such "intellectual" exercise is easily understood. Here was a man, a nondescript communist, on whom the entire police of the country have been let loose, while redoubtable communist leaders planning revolution on a grand scale are being forced to put on fat because the police would not touch them despite all their fire-eating. The occupation of the establishment communists was threatened by Charu Majumdar's dare-devilry in attempting to make a revolution, maybe in his own obsessed, egotistic, romantic and twisted way, without the blessings of the State. So he was dubbed an agent-provocateur, or a lackey of U. S. imperialism taking his directions from the arch-lackey Mao, or at least a heretic.

The post-mortem praise is not without a purpose. While pouring forth their praise for Majumdar, most of the left parties have suggested that he died a natural death. What hell would have been raised by these parties if any of their leaders had died in police custody, and that too within a fortnight of his capture after evading the police for three years ! They took their cue from the Chief Minister, Mr Siddhartha Sankar Ray, who seems to have broken a convention in making a reference in the Assembly to the death of an outsider. (Even Jamini Roy's death went

unmentioned in the House because of this convention.) Mr Ray took this extraordinary step only to plead the innocence of his government.

Charu Majumdar was a sick man needing constant medical attention. Among those arrested with him from his Entally hideout was a doctor. A theory in official circles is that he recklessly tried to force the pace of revolution because he knew that he was not given many years to live and work for it. The official version of his death may be true. Yet the average citizen will be intrigued by the fact that the heart that could bear the rigours and tensions of underground life for nearly three years should have been unable to stand the care and comforts provided by the Government for even a fortnight. Mrs Majumdar herself has knocked out some of the Lalbazar stories of the Government's solicitude for Majumdar. Once suspicion is allowed to raise its head, many things may appear to fall into place beginning with the Police Commissioner's disclosure to reporters on July 16 that the police surgeon had certified that Majumdar was "not in an unsatisfactory condition." Did the surgeon's verdict lead to denial of medicines which alone could keep his damaged heart beating ? The police themselves have given out stories of Majumdar's "interrogation." For how many hours did such "interrogation" continue every night ? Was his heart strong enough to bear the daily strain ? These are questions left unanswered by the statements of Mr Ray and his obliging parties.

August 5, 1972

Letter

"CRIME" AND PUNISHMENT

The account of repression and reign of terror presented by the Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights in

their appeal published on September 16, 1972 is somewhat incomplete and unbalanced. It emphasises exclusively that aspect of the treatment of the prisoners that involves physical torture and physical annihilation. But our ruling class is much too sophisticated to indulge in blind torturing and slaughtering.

From available reports it would appear that the police are applying the following differentiated treatment to various categories of prisoners :

(a) *Summary killing* : This treatment is reserved for those who are considered to have no promise of future use by the police and who do not have class and family backgrounds holding influence over the police. Among leading cadres only Saroj Datta is suspected to have been subjected to this summary treatment. Most of the victims of this treatment seem to be of lower middle class or working class or peasant background holding leading positions within the CPI(ML) ranks.

(b) *Physical ill-treatment or torture, sometimes leading to death* : This treatment is reserved for those who are considered to be potentially useful in the sense that they may be made to yield information that would lead to further arrests or who come over to join the ranks of the police or the Congress. This may be the most commonly practised treatment. Exceptions however are made : (i) for major leaders who are public figures and about whose treatment uncomfortable questions might have to be answered in Parliament ; (ii) such politically mature cadres who would not easily bend under torture and who may be made to yield results by other techniques ; and (iii) those having the right kind of family and class background.

(c) *Psychological pressure and psychological conditioning* : There are reports that some of the important leaders are being subjected to torture that is not physical, but involves modern techniques of affecting the mind and the brain. (I have heard of a particular case of the victim being subjected to, among many other things, protracted sessions of recorded

music.) This treatment appears to be specially meant for the politically important and mature cadres.

(d) *Buying off*: This is being practised just as widely as the practice of physical torture and simultaneously this technique is applied to lumpen elements and those from the criminal underworld whom the purely political elements allowed to get involved with them at the cost of the disaster that followed.

(e) *Pure Christian charity, based on class affinity*: This treatment is being reserved for the young men of upper middle class background with good family connections. With respect to such cases the top officials of the police administration take personal solicitous interest. They themselves go out of their way to contact the parents and relatives of the errant young men and suggest the conditions under which they may be let off unconditionally. Quite often the condition is that the young accused should be packed off to some foreign country, some citadel of Occidental bourgeois civilisation to get the opportunity of being re-educated. This approach has of course for aim the moral rather than physical annihilation of the victim. People who save themselves thus, leaving their comrades in-arms with less good family connections in the lurch, cannot but become morally maimed for the rest of their lives.

Those who accept the facts of a class-divided, status-ridden society will not be surprised to see such discrimination being practised even in the onesided trials that are being quietly conducted in the courts without any fanfare (this absence once again points to the mature wisdom of our ruling class). It should not surprise anybody if it turns out that those who will be condemned to life terms will be mostly of peasant background whereas most of the middle-class accused are let off relatively lightly. That would unmistakably point to a deep and mature understanding of the ruling class as to what constitutes its real enemy.

ASHOK RUDRA
Calcutta

October 14, 1972

Orissa

A BORDER REPORT

A CORRESPONDENT

The border area of southern Orissa (Ganjam District) and northern Andhra Pradesh (Srikakulam District) has been subdued by counter-revolution, and is in the grip of savage police repression and exploitation. Many of the villagers, tribal and non-tribal, in the hills and plains, helped the revolutionaries ; now they are incapable of helping themselves. For a short period the revolutionaries put fear into the hearts of landlords and moneylenders and challenged their domination of the peasants. Now the exploiters have been reinstated in their power more firmly, because armed police camps occupy the area. Oppression by police and Government officials has become more cruel because of these unwelcome guests quartered on the helpless land.

Annihilation of exploiters has not helped the peasants. The peasants of the plains village of Banjore in Andhra Pradesh and of the small neighbouring hamlets on the hills were at the mercy of the Sahukar of Banjore, Sara Appana. In Banjore village he owned more than 70 acres of paddy land. Seventy-three per cent of the villagers are landless, and live by labour when work is available (at the rate of Rs. 2 per day for men Rs. 1.25 for women), and by collecting and selling firewood (to do which they must bribe the forest guards). The small hill hamlets of Kantasahi, Gopalsahi and Rangamatia neighbouring Banjore contain forty households of Saora tribals. They possess little hill-land, but all the paddy land they had owned in the past was seized by Sara Appana when they were unable to pay back the money borrowed from him at heavy interest. Now they cultivate that land, guard it from wild animals and harvest the crops, only to store them in the landlord's house.

Sara Appana was killed by the revolutionaries, but now, safe in the knowledge of police protection, his son continues to exploit the peasants. Many landlords from other villages in the area who fled at that time have returned.

Sealloti village, in the R-Udaygiri subdivision of Ganjam district, is mainly a tribal village, hit very badly by the recent cyclone. In the village 40 per cent of the peasants have no land for settled cultivation, but a few do shifting cultivation on hill-lands ; for this privilege they pay at least Rs. 50 a year to the forest guards. Two philanthropists of the village lend money to the villagers. For this service the villagers repay at harvest time in crops, paddy, millet or ganja, at the rate of three to five times the original loan. These kind gentlemen also buy mohul fruit from the villagers in the season, 8 to 15 gouni per rupee, and resell it—3 gouni per rupee three or four months later. One of these businessmen made himself friend of the revolutionaries. In private he reasons that he will one day be a rich man.

Exploitation by the police and forest officials is traditional, especially in the interior areas. Forest officials take bribe for allowing collection of firewood or shifting cultivation. Police frequently descend to take money, chickens, rice or other food-stuffs, on all sorts of pretexts. Common threat is that if any villager does not pay what the police demand, he will be accused of being a Naxalite, tortured and thrown into jail. In the Banjore and Sealloti areas the police have been unable to find any revolutionaries, and have resorted to arresting poor tribals, who are in fact completely ignorant of politics.

A large police camp has been established in Banjore. The police extort free labour from the villagers, as porters and for doing odd jobs in the camp, and demand chickens and goats either free or at ludicrously low prices. They say that the villagers owe them something for being protected against "Naxalite goondas". The police (Orissa Military Police) stationed in Parlakimedi sub-station of Ganjam District, have seized goats, chickens and vegetables from many villagers, threatening and

often administering savage beatings. Acccording to the complaints collected by the local MLA, Gorsanga Sabara, OMP personnel have seized a total of 195 goats and innumerable chickens from eleven villages, either without paying or by paying a ridiculously low price.

However, it cannot be said that the activities of the revolutionaries have been entirely fruitless, even in the short run. For the consciousness of the villagers has been raised everywhere in the area, at least to the extent that they are aware that their poverty and exploitation are not eternal, that the poor have the right to act against the rich and the Government officials, and that the peasants are not alone. Of course the levels of consciousness vary among them. Where it is least formed, as in some hill areas, the people have only a blind hatred of the police, but see no possibility of change, and they rely only on God. But they are at least prepared to articulate their grievances, as in the case of the villagers of Parlakimedi and R-Udaygiri sub-division who submitted petitions against police depredations to their MLA. Of course petitions are meaningless, but in the present situation of white terror nothing else is possible, though it may be doubted if the villagers themselves have much faith in their effectiveness. The landless, poor and middle peasants of the Banjore area are well aware of the system, they despise the Government and support the policies of the revolutionaries. But with a police camp on their doorstep they are scarcely in a position to express their feelings. In the Telugu-speaking villages of Uppalada and Lingipur about eight miles from Parlakimedi town, consciousness is widespread, advanced and articulate. But it is well-known that any kind of protest against the system or against the present repression will be fatal ; protesters would be accused of being Naxalites, then tortured and jailed.

December 23, 1972

Comment

PRISONERS AND PARLIAMENT

There is perhaps a case for not embarrassing the Government's right to deal adequately with its internal enemies, real or imagined, by making fine points about fundamental rights and all that. If the Government should yet get into trouble over these points, it must be given time to re-define its power to keep the enemies at bay. Some such plea must have led India's Attorney-General, Mr Niren De to assure the Supreme Court that Section 17-A of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act would be amended within 10 days to obviate the consequences of its possible abrogation following the arguments in a habeas corpus petition challenging the Act. The Court obligingly reserved its judgment for two weeks at the end of the hearing.

Admitting that there are more than 5,000 detenus under the Act in West Bengal alone, Mr De expressed the fear that all these prisoners would have to be released in the event of the impugned Act being struck down. There would also be difficulties in detaining them again. The proposed amendment is apparently designed to bypass these difficulties. Detention of such a large number of persons without trial (the figure exceeds 8,000 in the whole country) would be abnormal even in an actual and not merely formal state of emergency.

Estimates as to the total number of political prisoners in West Bengal including those held under MISA vary from 12,000 to 18,000. It is admitted that even those held under specific charges cannot be convicted for lack of evidence acceptable to the court. Specious arguments are put forward for detaining them on one pretext or another even in defiance of law. The victims cannot apparently claim legal safeguards because of their alleged crimes against the rule of law. It is sinister, Mephistophelian logic to deny legal and democratic

rights to supposed enemies of the law. All this adds to the impression that there is little genuine respect for law in this country. But then, democracy or law can mean different things to different people. After all, it was not Karl Marx but Lewis Carrol who made Humpty Dumpty say to Alice when she objected to this confusion of meaning : 'The question is which is to be the Master—that's all."

April 7, 1973

STUDY OF A JAIL

A GROUP OF REPORTERS

This report has been prepared on the basis of the direct experience of about twenty-five prisoners lately confined in the Calcutta Presidency Jail, supposed to be one of the very best in India.

As you enter the Presidency Jail through the massive iron gate, you will find on getting past the office rooms a beautifully tended, neatly laid-out flower garden bordered with croton and casurina, with a square pool of clear water nestling by its side and a green-carpeted playground on the further bank. This is the "front view" of Presidency Jail. But if, instead of ending your tour here, you go ahead a few steps on your right, then, getting past another gate, you will come across the "Chowka", i.e., the kitchen. Food for about 2000 people is daily prepared there. If it is around 10 or 11 a.m. you are likely to see (not everyday, of course) a couple of well-dressed authoritarian-looking gentlemen, followed by a retinue, entering or coming out of the Chowka. These are the great prison overlords, the Super (Superintendent) or the Deputy Super and the Jailor, who have taken infinite pains to pay a hurried visit (with handkerchiefs to their august noses) to these dirty and stinking kitchen precincts. You might even hear them

making comments like "Too good !" as they beat a hasty retreat without coming anywhere near the actual cooking place. Former Superintendent, B. J. Das, had been often heard saying things like, "Why are you putting so much oil in that (oilless) curry ? It will make them ill. Can dogs digest ghee ?" The substances in question are, of course, duly transferred to the quarters of those who can very well digest them.

Opposite the Chowka you will find a large crowd gathered around two water-taps struggling to get water for drinking and bathing. Especially in summer it is exceedingly difficult to get more than four mugs of bathing water. All of a sudden you will see two or three persons in convicts' uniform arriving with a huge drum which they start filling, quietly shoving everyone off. No complaint is possible because the water in the drum is needed for the "25th Degree" convicts, i.e., those notorious convict-agents (*chamchas* in jail parlance) with whose aid the authorities run the prison. (More on this "25th Degree" later.) Anyway, the result is that entire pressure descends on the remaining tap. Maybe, just then two more such people carrying a huge bucket get hold of the other tap this time to secure water for the "Jamadar Saab" and the sepoys. Complaints would be equally futile. All have to stand by helplessly until the drum and the bucket have been filled. Within a few minutes again people turn up from the Milk Department with huge empty cans. Everyone knows what this water is for—to be put into the milk. They feel grateful in a way that they are taking fresh water from the tap rather than getting it from some dirty ditch.

The way to the godown passes by the kitchen and alongside it is a huge filthy drain down which all the dirt from the prison flows. Right upon it stand the punitive cells—the "Tenth Degree." These cells admit neither light nor air and each has a single ventilator opening right on the stinking drain. Five of these cells are inhabited by prisoners suffering from leprosy while in the other five "dangerous" and "obstinate" prisoners are kept by way of punishment. It is in one of these

that the Naxalite leader Jangal Santal is at present being forced to pass his days. There are 44 more ordinary cells in another part of the jail and they are not much better than the punitive cells.

Turning west from the Chowka one comes across, after a couple of minutes' walk, a long two-storeyed building divided into wards—the "residence" of convicts and undertrial prisoners and "without trial" detenus. In each room 50 to 100 prisoners are kept confined ; at times many more. (In 1971, more than 250 people used to be packed at times in each.) At such times there is hardly room enough for all even to sit on the floor. Besides, there is a huge hall known as "Darihazat" or "Daria" in which about 350 people are forced to live. In 1971, near-about 800 prisoners used to be forced into it. Presidency Jail has an official capacity of 2000 prisoners. In 1971, nearly 4000 people used to be kept there.

All the wards are locked up for the night at 5-30 p. m. (earlier, in winter) and from then till 6 in the morning the hundred or more people inside urinate (within the room) at a windowside drain. For defecation during the night there is a tub, practically exposed to view, set in a corner in each room. The terrible all-night stink is stifling. Stinking drains run immediately outside the walls of each room. Besides, the entire Jail premises are full of clumps of bushes, filthy open drains and broken old cisterns full of dirty stagnant water, rendering them a perfect breeding ground for flies and mosquitoes. These pests render the lives of the prisoners intolerable by night and by day.

A prisoner is taken to his particular ward the day after he arrives. There he gets from the "Mate", i. e., Ward-in Charge (a convict) a couple of blankets, an aluminium plate and a bowl (manufactured in the Jail). It is of course different in the "Darihazat" ; there nothing can be had unless one can "manage" it. (More later on this "management" business.)

The doors of the wards are open at 6 a.m. for two hours

to enable prisoners to brush their teeth, bathe, answer calls of nature etc. A sort of courtyard is attached to the front of every ward (which also serves for the upper storey). On one side of it are the latrines, each about two feet wide, the partition walls being about two feet high. These latrines are neither of the service nor of the sanitary variety. They are cleaned only once in 24 hours, at about 8 a.m. The result is that they are almost all the time heaped up with excrement, rendering them, with their awful stink and the swarms of flies, practically unapproachable. There is a water-tap and a cistern for every two wards. The cisterns are mostly damaged and unusable, and the taps get clogged quite often. When working, the taps yield the merest trickle of water, and 150 to 200 prisoners jostle and fight each other in trying to get water for bathing, washing clothes and cleaning utensils, for drinking, for the latrine, etc. at those slender sources. Many resort to the taps at the Chowka because the flow is better there; but the difficulties there have already been described. On top of all this the great arbiters, the sepoys (warders) often hit out indiscriminately with their lathis to "preserve law and order". At times, the sepoys just order the prisoners not to go to the Chowka taps, resulting in a terrible rush at the taps in the wards. Then, quite often, it is not possible even to get one's drinking water, not to speak of water for bathing. Only if the sepoys can be effectively bribed with tea, cigarettes, etc. can the prisoners get permission again to go to the Chowka taps. Bribing also becomes adsolutely necessary if, finding the allotted latrines clogged with filth, one wishes to use a latrine in a neighbouring ward. The wards are locked up at 8 a.m., opening again at 10 or 10-30 and closed again at 12-30. They are opened for the last time at 3 p.m. and locked up for the night at 5-30 (5 p.m. or even earlier, in winter).

These wards, especially the ground floor rooms, admit very little light or air. To make matters worse, there are baffle-walls before most of the windows. The rooms are dark and damp all the time. The walls of even the upper rooms re-

main water-soaked throughout the rainy season, and on the ground floor the damp seeps into the blankets which serve as beds. Lighting arrangements at night are even worse. Each of the huge rooms (averaging about 50 ft × 25 ft) are lit by four 40-watt lamps of which some are always out of order, sometimes all of them. Reading is out of the question ; nothing is visible clearly.

In this weird twilight go on the homosexual activity of the long-term convicts—which is under unofficial registration from the authorities and is one of the standing sources of their illegal income. This sort of activity has been going on in the Jail for years in a fully planned and organised way. The entire Jail staff, from the sepoys and jamadars right up to the officers have weekly or monthly arrangements with these homosexual criminals. When the new prisoners arrive in the late afternoon these hardened old convicts go out to inspect whether there are any "*bhalo chhokras*" (good young men) among them. If there are, bargaining at once starts. That is the "bhalo chhokra" is put on auction. Fifty ! Seventy ! One hundred ! —the bidding goes on. The unfortunate youth is put in the ward in which the highest bidder lives. The helpless cries and complaints of the boy fall on deaf ears, and prove quite futile, because the entire staff including the officers have been rendered "*barabbar*", i.e., squared, with money. There is, of course, a rule designed to prevent this sort of atrocity—for putting the prisoners under 18 years in a separate room known as the "Youth File". But that paper regulation has no effect on the triumphant running of this racket.

Prisoners in entire wards often have their sleep rudely disturbed by the noise of the cruel beating inflicted on their victims by these homosexual monsters and the pitiful cries of the victims. But anyone daring to protest is sure to be beaten mercilessly by the sepoys and jamadars next morning.

There are some "dangerous" prisoners in many of the wards whose feet are kept chained either with "danda-beri" or

with "shikli-beri" for three months or six months or indefinitely, as the case may be. But if you can make a cash arrangement ("nagad karbar") with the jamadars and the officers, you can get your chains off immediately. On the other hand, inability to pay may result in a prolongation of the punishment.

There is a standing alliance between contractors and the Jail authorities leading to enormous mutual profit. At intervals the contractors get busy with repairing, whitewashing and painting work. Nothing is done. The whitewash leaves the walls almost as drab-looking as before. Plaster which had been only recently done and which is in quite good condition is taken off with great pains and new plaster put on. This process may be repeated only three months later. Another of the ways in which the Jail authorities add to their income is through food.

Food is served to the prisoners thrice daily (i.e., usually). No food is served at night. The meal that is served at 5 or 5-30 p.m. immediately before the wards are locked up is supposed to be the meal for the night.

Most of the days the prisoners get boiled *chhola* (gram) for breakfast, without any trace of oil or spices, at times without salt. Copiously mixed with the *chhola* are gravel, dirt of a wide variety, including the droppings of mice and cockroaches, and dead worms. At times a kind of hard, dry, unchewable *muri* is served ; on other occasions a kind of stinking *chira* (*chura*) with a proper admixture of dirt, gravel and paddy grains. With it is given a few drops of the coarsest and filthiest molasses, half of which is made up of jute fibres and, of course, pure earth. On some days is served the famous *lapsi*, a nauseating hotch-potch of boiled broken rice, wheat and other cereals with a dash of salt and turmeric powder and all sorts of dirt. If the quantity is found inadequate, a few buckets of water are simply poured into the stuff. Yet, in a desperate bid to get a little more even of this filthy broth, the hungry prisoners almost fight each other because they had their

last meal 14 or 15 hours ago—at 5 or 6 on the previous evening. Breakfast for Grade II classified prisoners (MISA-B or Undertrial-I) is supposed to consist of a slice of bread-and-butter, a banana and tea. The tea has filthy taste and a stink which makes it practically undrinkable ; the banana is either "unavailable" or, if available, is no bigger than the human thumb ; and the butter provided could put out a good sized fire, so full of water it is. Not that good quality stuff is not provided but it is all transferred to the quarters of the "good" people.

Then, at about 12 noon or 12-30 comes the midday meal—supposed to consist of rice, dal and curry. But the quantity of rice is not enough even to appease the hunger of a ten-year-old child. The rice is spiced with all the usual items—paddy seeds, gravel, dead worms, etc. Since the recent cut in the rice ration, the quantity has further gone down. The "rules" in this respect provide that the cut in rice quota is to be made up with potatoes or some such stuff. This rule is followed by supplying two tiny potatoes (one, if bigger) to each famished prisoner. Of these potatoes most are rotten ; but many of the desperately hungry prisoners cannot even leave these off, and there is no dearth of prisoners who are only too eager to gobble down the rotten potatoes discarded by others. The *kalai dal* (pulse) served almost everyday is of incredibly wretched quality and abounds in worms, gravel, excreta of cockroaches and rats and cockroaches' eggs. The vegetables provided are the most wretched and rotten available in the market. All these stinking vegetables are put into the curry with their rinds and stems intact ; the latter are supposed to be part of the prisoners' "diet". Fish and meat are supposed to be served only once a week each. These often get dropped from the weekly list. When provided, the fish pieces are of such a size that a couple of them (served to two people) could be easily packed inside a match box. The quantity of "meat" served to a person gets "lost" if it is poured from one bowl into another. In the *dal* and the curry are sometimes found

good-sized bits of high-protein stuff—boiled cockroaches. They are usually removed from the curry before being brought to the wards, (that is why one often finds dead cockroaches scattered about the kitchen floor). On occasion when, by oversight, the curries are brought with the dead cockroaches in them, the prisoners refuse to accept the food, the stuff is simply taken back to the kitchen, and after the cockroaches are removed, is brought back as "fresh" stuff. Well, how is it possible to cook it all over again ? And supposing that is done, what is the guarantee that there won't be cockroaches in that too ?

In the late afternoon (but meant for the night) is served a meal of three *rotis* plus the same *dal* and curry. Because of the recent cut in the wheat ration the number of *rotis* per head has come down to two. The *rotis* are made of a mixture of *besan*, milo etc. with a little (wheat) *ata* added. The paste for the roti served in the evening is prepared at 10 a.m. All stale left-overs are mixed up with the fresh paste, often making the rotis stink. Since the reduction in the number of rotis a supplementary item of boiled chhola, gravel and dead worms is served.

But even for this normally inedible food the prisoners (at least the great majority of them) tensely wait like starved animals in cages. Long before the food arrives they file up with their plates and bowls in their hands. Quite often the lordly sepoys make abundant use of their lathis to maintain order. But at this hour not even the dreaded *danda* can make the prisoners budge an inch from the food-line. If, accidentally, there is some *dal* left over, there is a pitiful scramble for it. The fortunate ones who can get some extra *dal* instantly drink up the tasteless filthy stuff.

There are days when the midday meal arrives two or three or even four hours late. Unable to stand the hunger some of the prisoners at times go up to the Chowka to enquire, and receive a few blows from the sepoys' *dandas* for their pains. Then at 4 or 4-30 p.m. the prisoners might find their midday

and evening meals arriving simultaneously. Extreme disorder prevails as almost every one of the starved prisoners tries to get his food first. To add to the confusion, time is short since, according to regulations, the wards are to be locked up for the night within half an hour or so. A horrible, nerve-racking chaos prevails.

The authorities are perfectly aware of the nature of the food served in the jail. That is why they take utmost care to see that not a scrap of prison food can be taken out of the jails.

The prison rules provide for special diets for prisoners suffering from gastric ulcer or tuberculosis. But in practice it is extremely difficult for any ailing prisoner to get such diet without offering substantial bribes. Even when such a sick diet is arranged, there is no knowing when the patient will have it ; it may be 3 p.m. before he gets his special midday meal.

Living in this sort of environment and consuming this sort of food, most prisoners succumb to all sorts of illness. Most prisoners, at least periodically, suffer from colds and coughs, pains in the head, the chest and all sorts of intestinal disorders. And the most widespread ailment is a multitude of skin diseases—sores, boils, all sorts of pimples and rashes, carbuncles, etc. As already stated, medicines are scarce ; compress with hot water is often the only available remedy. Quite often it becomes necessary to heat water at night because in some patients the pains in the chest and in the waist region aggravate during night hours. Oil also has to be heated at times for rubbing into sore spots. Moreover the milk for the TB or gastric patients is often served so late that it is not possible to get it boiled before locking-up time. It has therefore to be heated inside the wards at night. But the lighting of the smallest fire calls forth a horrible stream of abuse from the sepoy or the jamadar and might result in the supposed offender being beaten up and put in a cell in the morning—because lighting fires inside wards is forbidden. And yet, in practice, fires are lit in all the wards at night (with old news-

papers, wrapping papers, rags etc.) for the aforesaid urgent reasons, and this is known to all and has been going on since the jails were set up. The crux of the matter lies in the fact that if one wants to light a fire in a ward, one must pay the necessary "tax" to the sepoy-jamadar fraternity. Foodstuff won't do ; it must be either cash or 'Sunlight' or 'Lifebuoy' soap. (Soap is a great favourite with these creatures.) It is said that by this process the Bara Jamadar (Head Warder) gets altogether soap worth several hundred rupees every month. You can light a huge furnace in the ward if you can afford to keep these divinities appeased. In that case there won't be a murmur of objection and the rules would not stand in the way. It is absolutely no use complaining to the officers because they not only know everything but appropriate a portion of the money and the soap acquired by this process.

Officially, prisoners can be interviewed twice a month by their relatives. (Of course, the right sort of bribery to the right person would enable you to have interviews daily.) For the bulk of the prisoners the interview takes place in a dark dungeon-like room. Two distinct vertical frames of wire-netting stand between the interviewers and the interviewee through which they can only dimly perceive one another's presence. The time allowed in actual practice is 3 to 5 minutes, sometimes even less (cash deals will of course enable you to extend the duration). For this moment's sight of the dear ones the relatives and friends have to wait for hours—sometimes 7 or 8 hours at the Jail gate. There is no seating arrangement and they have no shelter either from the scorching sun or torrential rain. On top of all this is the frequent abuse and the occasional outrageous comments from the warders and even from the officers. The ordeal it imposes, particularly on the women among the visitors, is often unspeakable. Not seldom, even after all this, are they turned away with the verdict, "It can't be today. Come tomorrow." Many of these visitors are from far-off villages and have no place to stay in the city. For the classified (middle-grade) prisoners

the interview takes place in a room adjoining the office. There are benches on either side of a long table, on one side of which sits the prisoner and on the other his visitor. All the conversation takes place in the constant presence of 2 or 3 officers of the Special Branch of the Calcutta Police. The time allowed is 20 minutes.

All the foodstuff and other articles brought by the visitors for the prisoners are searched, i.e., ransacked, not once but two or three times. The new Security Officer's plan is to institute the custom of searching even the bags and the person of the visitors. But even after all this ridiculous show a great part of the articles intended for the prisoners does not reach them ; a considerable part vanishes in the process. Even part of the residue which gets to the prisoners is taken away by the warders on some excuse or other and sometimes even by force.

When some trouble takes place in the Jail, i.e., when after committing some big violent atrocity on the prisoners the authorities propagate news like "Authorities' Vigilance Foils Jail-break Attempt", great strictness is observed for some time in regard to interviews. Not only are relatives not allowed to see the injured prisoners, they are not even given any information about their condition. Even visitors to other prisoners are searched with far greater vigour. Even the visitors' bodies are searched—the women not excluded. Often on such occasions all interviews are suspended for a considerable period, while relatives of injured prisoners, maddened with anxiety, gather at the prison gates every day of the week in the vain hope of getting some news.

A marvellous co-operation between the police and the Jail Hospital authorities is noticeable in regard to the treatment of sick prisoners. Some have their hands or legs (or both) broken, some keep vomitting blood time to time, some throw up their food almost after every meal, some have old festering sores in which worms have settled ; others have partially lost their memory under the terrible beatings and electric shocks

administered by the police. No treatment is practically accorded to these prisoners ; they are left untreated not only day after day but month after month. The result is that the dangerously sick among them take a quick journey to death. Of course the prison authorities do not accept responsibility for their death. They are granted a special kind of release ("*jan-khalas*" in jail parlance) and carried out of the prison premises a few days, sometimes a few hours, before their death. After keeping the undertrial prisoner Ramal Roy Choudhuri untreated in a dangerous condition for two whole years he was, in April 1972, given this kind of special release, "jan-khalas",—and he died at 8 p.m. on the same day. A young man named Dipak is even now lying in a perilous state in the Jail hospital. The doctors say that he is going to expire in another six months and the police have resolved that he won't be released. Surely, this young man too will be granted a similar "jan-khalas" immediately before his death. Megharanjan Sen Gupta (Ward No. 20), an undertrial prisoner, has been lying in the jail (not in hospital) in a dangerously sick and crippled condition for more than three years. Monstrous beating and repeated administration of electric shocks by the police have paralysed one of his legs and partially destroyed his memory. Dhiren Babu (of the same ward), another undertrial prisoner, has nearly lost his eyesight in course of his four years of confinement. After a long spell of callous neglect one of his eyes has just been operated upon ; but even after two months there is no sign of improvement. Azizul Haque, confined in the 1-22 cell serial, has been lying desperately ill for a long period ; the doctors' opinion is that he can die any day and the police are determined (as they have told his relatives) that he shall end his days in prison. Besides, there are quite a few who are supposed to be awaiting treatment by specialists ; but time passes and the treatment is perpetually deferred.

And this is the jail famed for its superior medical arrangements where prisoners from different West Bengal jails are

brought for special treatment. Imagine, then, what kind of medical attention prisoners receive in the other jails !

At about 10 in the morning (except on Sundays when the Hospital remains closed and no medical aid is available) the Ward Mate or the convict-in-charge takes the ailing prisoners to the Hospital. But usually not more than two patients are allowed to attend Hospital from each ward, which practically means that not more than two prisoners per ward per day are allowed to fall ill. They have to wait in the hospital queue hour after hour. The doctors arrive just when it pleases them, gossip with staff as long as they like, after which they spend most of the time attending to the sick warders and their families. Then at long last comes the brief wholesale treatment of the long-suffering prisoners. Most of the prisoners are "treated" by Dr Gupta, notorious for his misbehaviour and the obscenity of his language. He usually writes down the prescription within a few seconds of the patient reaching his side—quite often before the patient has had the opportunity of uttering a single word. If the patient still insists on explaining his condition, he is abused and shoved out, sometimes with a few telling blows.

For headache, stomachache, fever, coughs and colds, chest pains, asthma, dysentery, rheumatism, boils, sores and rashes and for most other ailments there are two universal remedies—Sulfadiazine and APC powders. At times when the doctors prescribe some liquid mixture, the medicine cannot be taken to the wards for want of bottles, the first dose has to be taken in the Hospital dispensary (the succeeding doses, as the doctors very well know, are usually never taken). On the dispensary table stand rows of old bottles containing different (?) mixtures. But no one on the staff cares from which bottle you might take your dose or how much of it you take—for the simple reason that they all contain more or less the same thing—pure water.

It is very difficult even for a patient in emergency condition to get admitted to the Hospital—unless he or she has strong

recommendation from above or a fat purse. About a dozen perfectly healthy people, however, have been able, by means of *nagad karbar*, i.e., cash arrangement, to stay on for months in complete comfort in the Hospital. This too, is known to all and all have their due share of the proceeds.

The patient does not get any diet from the Hospital immediately after admission. He is kept without food ; for how is it possible to know beforehand what sort of diet the doctor might prescribe for him ? Therefore, the patient, regardless of his condition, is kept absolutely unfed or on a few ounces of barley water for the first one or two days. Then starts the famous treatment with Sulfadiazine and APC. We know of a prisoner who was given 14 or 15 APC doses on a single day ; he was a gastric patient.

The amount of foodstuff stolen from the patients' diet is just incredible. Not even half of the officially sanctioned food ever reaches the patients. The entire Jail staff ranging from the lowest warder up to the highest officer is a sharer in spoils of this Hospital food robbery.

Some patients are prescribed special diets, and necessary diet cards are issued to them from the Hospital. It is extremely difficult to get such cards issued unless, of course, one can do *nagad karbar* which would render it perfectly easy. Hard bargaining goes on all the time in the Jail over the issue of these diet cards and constitute another of the fat sources of income for the authorities.

There is hard competition among the sepoy-jamadar fraternity for getting hospital duty ; for there is no more lucrative assignment in the whole prison set-up. Quite often one comes across warders in the Hospital munching bread and butter, banana, apples etc, not to speak of the copious quantities of fish and meat they misappropriate.

Not that there aren't a few doctors or assistants in the Jail who are sympathetic to the prisoners ; but they are quite helpless in the face of this all-enveloping corruption and high-handedness.

All the work in the Jail is done by convicts and undertrial prisoners. It is absolutely illegal to get any work done by UT prisoners. Therefore those among them who are made to work are given the title of "volunteers" although actually they are induced to work for a litle extra food or for ganja and other drugs or sometimes under sheer threat of chastisement. The way these "volunteers" are made to drudge from dawn to dusk, the way the warders drive them about with their lathis like flocks of cattle and the way they are abused and mercilessly beaten up on every possible excuse is plainly reminiscent of the ancient system of slave labour. All the work at the residence of the Jail officers is done by the short-term prisoners—although this is, to say the least, absolutely illegal. Early in 1973, one such convict, working at the residence of the then Superintendent B. J. Das, was so horribly beaten by the Superintendent's son that he lost his eyes. (The incident was reported in the papers.)

There is a workshop in the Jail where the convicts work. Their wages usually range from 35 to 45 paise a day. Even of this ridiculously paltry amount a substantial portion is misappropriated by the jamadars and officers by way of "fines" on various excuses.

Convicts or undertrial prisoners are made to do the accounting work, the work of gathering up the prisoners from the different wards for interviews or for being taken to count, the work of taking regular count of the prisoners. Such convict employees are called 'writers'. Those among the 'writers' are powerful and influential by virtue of their readiness to carry out all the behests of the authorities, however heinous, have their quarters in the room adjacent to the office—the notorious "25th Degree". The food prepared for these 25th Degree VIPs is of a quality to be found only in the most celebrated hotels of Calcutta. Apart from copious quantities of fish, meat, eggs and milk, plenty of liquor and ganja is provided. Quite often gambling goes on at night—worth thousands of rupees, although, according to Jail code, prisoners cannot keep any cash with them.

The most illustrious figure among these 'writers' is Kali Babu. He works in the office, keeps accounts and also keeps count of the prisoners. The jail administration would come to stop without him and, practically speaking, he is the man in authority. If one can come to a cash understanding with Kali Babu, there is nothing one cannot do in the jail. The prisoners have nicknamed him the "Jailor Babu". Kali Babu is actually an undertrial prisoner. He has been in Presidency Jail for several years and it is heard that he would like to spend the rest of his life in this paradise of the 25th Degree. The old prisoners say that before the time comes for Kali Babu to be acquitted of one charge, he takes care to bribe the police into presenting a fresh charge against him. He has been carrying on for years in this way. It is heard that sometimes Kali Babu goes out for marketing in the evenings. But it must be said that Kali Babu performs his duties in the Jail office scrupulously and it is his constant care to see that the prisoners do not get any advantage in any respect whatsoever. When someone is being released, Kali Babu keeps him waiting for hours while he sedulously rings up different branches of the police in an anxious effort to ascertain if any of them might be interested in re-arresting him. If he gets the slightest hint of a possibility of re-arrest, Kali Babu keeps the poor prisoner waiting in the office for hours on various technical excuses. Only when he is sadly convinced that none is interested in re-arresting him, he at last reluctantly allows him to go.

It is difficult to say how much exactly is Kali Babu's (entirely illegal) monthly income from the Jail, but doubtless it is very substantial. All this money is sent out of the Jail through the warders and then comes back to Kali Babu by money order and is deposited in his account or to some ghost account. This, of course, happens (in smaller amounts) also in the cases of some of the other 'writers' and old convicts of the prison.

Another of these 25th Degree VIPs is Kaloo Panda. His business is at the "case table", the place where various items

of information and identification about the new prisoners are registered. Then Kaloo Babu allots the newcomers to different wards. The general practice in this respect is to put as many as possible in Dari-hazat (described earlier). Then when unable to stand the horrors of the Dari-hazat, some of the prisoners try to get transferred to some other ward, they are compelled to bribe Kaloo Babu (and others) with cash or soap. If there is the slightest inkling that a new prisoner would (for some reason) like to go to a particular ward, Kaloo Babu will take utmost care to see that he gets nowhere near that ward. Then, when he tries for a change, he is fleeced,

The 'writers' in Presidency Jail form practically the permanent staff there. Long practice in the same job has turned them into specialists in their respective lines and the Jail administration would come to a stop without them. Most of these 'writers' cannot stay out of jail long, even when released (the Jail has so thoroughly reformed them that their sense of gratitude seems to draw them back to it repeatedly.)

It is the sepoy-jamadar-writer fraternity who run the whole prison and it is they who determine the fate of two thousand prisoners. Without the gracious permission of these deities, no prisoner, however much he may try, can succeed in meeting any of the officers. Complaints about the conduct of any of them are useless for the simple reason that the officers are active participants in the colossal all-round racket that these people carry on from day to day.

Occasionally the Jailor or the Superintendent comes out to inspect the Jail. They are followed by a small army of warders led by the Head Warder. Every two or three minutes the Head Warder gives out a weird cry of Heiii-hoo and all the warders click heels and salute. The Jailor or the Superintendent never enters any ward and when they go on their round, no prisoner, however desperate his need, can speak to them. After a desultory to-and-fro movement over the premises for about 10 minutes these divinities call it a day and retire.

The prisoners are counted four times every day ; at 5-30 a.m., 6 a.m., 12-30 p.m. and once again in the late afternoon before the wards are locked up for the night. At the time of the counting the prisoners have to squat on the floor in pairs while a jamadar does the counting. Quite often there are mistakes in counting and, then the prisoners have to squat repeatedly—until the counting is satisfactorily done.

The Library in Presidency Jail is meant only for those who have already been sentenced—although about 80 per cent of the prisoners are either undertrial or MISA detenus. These 80 per cent have no right to use the Library.

Books brought by prisoners' relatives have to be deposited at the Jail Office. But no receipts are given. Under such conditions nothing can be done if the deposited books do not reach the prisoner concerned (as quite often happens). When they do reach the prisoners it is usually not before 15 days and some after a month. Every year large number of books intended for prisoners are stolen by the Jail staff.

No "political" books or papers or magazines are allowed. Even the sort of books printed in thousands of copies in this country and freely sold in huge numbers on the city pavements are in most cases not allowed. Decisions on this matter are taken by the Security Officer, practically a Special Branch appointee who is an absolute ignoramus and understands nothing about books. Some of the books are sent to the Special Branch police for their approval or otherwise. The Jailor and the Superintendent pleads helplessness in the matter, saying that it is all in the hands of the Special Branch.

Here is a list of some of the books and periodicals which the Jail authorities, under the direction of the Special Branch Police, held to be unsuitable for being passed on to the prisoners (June to September, 1793) :

(1) Tolstoy : *War and Peace* : (2) Bertrand Russell : *A History of Western Philosophy* ; (3) Arthur Eddington : *The Expanding Universe* ; (4) Dr. J. S. Horn : *Away*

with all pests ; (5) James Coleman : *Relativity for the Layman* ; (6) Samaresh Basu : *Ain Nei* ; (7) Different issues of *Soviet Desh* (Moscow) ; (8) Different issues of *New Times* (Moscow) ; (9) *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay) ; (10) *Bangladesh* (Calcutta) ; *Anushtup* (Calcutta) ; (11) *Frontier* (Calcutta).

This of course represents a small portion of the books held to be unsuitable. What is more, since the new Security Officer's arrival, exercise books or writing paper is withheld. The Security Officer's principle in this respect is to allow writing stuff only to intending examinees and to no other prisoners.

Towards the end of 1972, one of the Discipline Officers refused to pass a Bengali translation (by Buddhadeva Bose) of Kalidasa's *Meghadoot* on the ground that it contained a full map of India indicating the course of the Cloud's journey. Of course this was passed later. About Coleman's *Relativity for the Layman* the Security Officer's ingenious objection was that the book contained the formula for the atom bomb. The book *Without Marx and Without Christ : The American Revolution* was not passed because its title included two objectionable words, "Marx" and "Revolution". On one occasion, a D. O. even refused to pass an edition of *Ultorath* because the list of approved journals he had with him did not include that magazine. The list he had was presumably 20 years old.

Prisoners are allowed to write two letters every month and send them out through the "Welfare Office." Quite often the letters never reach the addressees ; when they do, there is a minimum delay of 15 days, sometimes a month or more. The letters written by relatives to prisoners have the same fate ; at least 30 per cent of them never reach the prisoners. Since the arrival of the new Security Officer irregularities regarding letters have greatly increased. A letter bearing the urgent intimation that someone is dangerously ill might often reach a prisoner quite a few weeks after

the person has expired. Nitai Das of Ward No. 20 actually received the news of his mother's serious illness (early this year) a few days after her *sradh* ceremony had been over.

In most cases letters written by political prisoners to their lawyers or to the Legal Aid Committee, Calcutta, reach their destination after the trial has started. The letter written to the Legal Aid Committee by Kalachand—still a prisoner—reached the Committee office on the day on which the court pronounced the death sentence on him.

The salaries of some prisoners reach them in the Jail by money order and are again sent by money order to respective families, after receiving which many of these (mostly) starved families are able to resume their normal kitchen activities for a time. But even in this matter there is no end of harrassment. In the first place the prisoners face great difficulty in getting permission to send an m. o. and in getting m. o. forms. Even after somehow handing over the completed form and the money to the appropriate people, a prisoner might very well learn from his relatives at an interview taking place weeks after, that the money had not yet reached them. Enquiry often reveals that the m. o. has not yet been despatched from the Jail—the simple reason being that it had come in handy at the time of some officer's personal need and would be despatched by m.o. only after the officer finds it convenient to return it. One comes to know from the old convicts that these "necessary appropriations" of the poor prisoners' money are intended to replenish the officers' racing funds. Signing payslips or authorizing someone to draw their pay for them is also an extremely harrassing affair for prisoners. Relatives have often to return baffled for this purpose after waiting for hours at the Jail gate, and quite often it proves difficult to get the business done without bribing the officer-in-charge.

There are also other difficulties in the matter of sending or receiving letters. The new Security Officer has recently ordained that the names and ward numbers of those for whom there are letters will be hung up at the Welfare Office ;

that is, prisoners won't be allowed, as they used to be before, to pick out their own letters from the heap of newly arrived letters lying on the Welfare Office table. From now on prisoners will have no idea as to how many letters may have come, they will have to take it that there are no letters for them if their names are not in the list. Since the new Security Officer took over, the number of letters received by the prisoners has gone down sharply. The general guess is that he passes only some of the letters while secretly destroying the others, and that is why he does not allow the prisoners to inspect the general heap of new letters. Even this is not all. The new rule requires every letter to be taken by its owner personally from the Welfare Office while at the same time there is the other rule that not more than one, or at best two, prisoners must visit the W. O. on the same day. The result is that urgent letters might be waiting on the office table for days, even for weeks, without their owners being aware of their existence.

On occasions when the IG or the DIG of Prisons comes on a tour of inspection, a hectic cleaning up operation is afoot from the early morning everywhere in the premises except inside the wards. On these days the prisoners' misery passes all bounds. The writers' tempers get particularly rough ; they are more strict than usual, they use their *dandas* more freely, and do not allow any one to pass from one ward into another. There is hardly time for bathing or for relieving oneself, for the wards are closed within a few minutes of being opened ; the prisoners are almost immediately driven back into the wards like herds of cattle. If the visitors arrive late, the prisoners have to starve for the better part of the day ; because no meals can be served to the prisoners before these divinities have left. But these august personages for whose reception there is such tremendous fuss never care to really go round the Jail premises, not to speak of meeting prisoners or enquiring into their living conditions.

On the most rare occasions there are "general" visitors (i.e., apart from Police or Government high ups) and,

absolutely by way of exception, they may enter one of the wards and talk to a few of the prisoners. Under such possibilities one or two wards are cleaned up beforehand and, of course, it is these wards only that the visitors enter (if at all) and, of course, the prisoners with whom they converse are nominated by the Superintendent or the Jailor in accordance with the Head Warder's advice. The visitors put all sorts of questions to the prisoners ; about their living conditions, the food and the treatment they get from their local guardians etc. . The prisoners have to answer these questions while they are ringed round with a dozen dandas and in the presence of the highest officers. Consequently the account of prison life received by the visitors is by no means repellent and has nothing to do with reality. The interrogated prisoner has no other course ; for if he happens to speak one word amiss (i.e., outside the formula taught), he would be within an inch of losing his life under the shower of the warders' dandas, the moment the visitor's back is turned.

It hardly needs mention that visitors hardly ever meet political prisoners. About the middle of 1972, something like a "Jail Enquiry Committee" including Ajoy Mukherjee, Pannalal Das Gupta etc. was set up. They did pay visits, but never cared to speak with prisoners inside the wards. Possibly they were too much enchanted with the flower garden and the crystal tank to be dissatisfied with anything. The Sarvodaya leader, Mr. J. P. Narain, also came once and talked to a few prisoners in the Superintendent's room and in the presence of Special Branch officers. But that was the end of it ; nothing more was heard of him.

Marketing arrangement for prisoners are made once or twice a week. That is, on the appointed days a contractor brings some articles such as biris, cigarettes, tea, sugar, molasses, soap, toothpaste, lungis, cheap slippers etc. into a room adjoining the Welfare Office. Prisoners accompanied by their respective Ward-mates can come and buy things, but

those prisoners alone can buy who have money deposited against their names in the Jail office. The articles presented for sale are the most wretched available in the market and are sold at much higher prices. A considerable part of the large quantity of soap extorted from the prisoners by the warders and the jamadars on various pretexts is sold back to the prisoners at this bazar.

There is a special bazar for the MISA Group B detenus who get a monthly allowance of 20 rupees. Prisoners have to submit lists of the intended shopping beforehand, and articles are brought accordingly. But there is absolutely no knowing when this bazar will be held ; sometimes it is not held for months. Meanwhile some of the MISA prisoners may have got their release, and the authorities are usually able to cite a rule showing that the allowance money lying in their accounts cannot be handed over to them at the time of release. By this ingenious stratagem detenus are often robbed of two or three months' allowance money.

The prisoners who are to attend court on a particular day are taken out of the wards by 9 a.m. Even sick prisoners are not excused ; they too must go unless they can produce a certificate of indisposition from a doctor. But the court-going van arrives before the doctor's arrival. Besides, there is no certainty whatever that the doctor will certify a genuinely sick prisoner as sick. In the circumstances, the only course left to the sick prisoner is bribery in cash, soap or cigarettes, and many have to resort to it.

For those whose feet are chained (with *danda-beri* or *shikli-beri*) setting out for the court is specially troublesome. The *beris* have to be painfully knocked off with chisel and hammer. For it is supposed to be absolutely impermissible for prisoners to be produced before the honourable judges, with their feet chained. The very next day, of course, their feet are back in chains.

The prison vans are moving dungeons. For windows they have a few tiny square holes netted over. Thirty, forty

or even fifty prisoners are at times forced into a van with a seating capacity of 15 or 16. Even after the space inside is filled up the police continue to force more prisoners in at the ends of their dandas. Having somehow packed the prisoners in like potatoes in sacks, they force the door shut and lock it up. The stinking heat within is oppressive, the prisoners sweat all over and are almost choked. On occasions some of the prisoners lose consciousness. The return journey is an exact repetition. On top of this the prisoners are often beaten up by the police on trifling excuses at the end of the journey. Thus undertrial prisoners return from the democratic courts in a half-dead condition at the end of the day. On getting inside the prison gate they have to squat in pairs near the officer's table, their names are called out and their bodies and belongings are searched. Then, on entering the inner premises they have to squat again and are again counted. They are then led into the *Amdani Ghar* (the "Import Room") which is a special hell in the midst of the general prison-hell. This room needs a more detailed description.

The *Amdani Ghar* is the room where newly arrived prisoners and those back from the court have to spend the night. The number of prisoners sleeping in it is uncertain. From 100 or 150 any number up to 300 may be packed inside it on a particular night. Half of the room, however, is occupied by its permanent residents, i.e., old convicts who have had long practice in beating up prisoners and those supremely favoured influential prisoners (such as Marwari businessmen and Congress criminals caught by chance) who, by copiously bribing the Mate and through him the warders and officers, live comfortably in the spacious hall of the room which remains open throughout the day, and have the food of their choice prepared inside the room. Consequently, the huge number of prisoners "imported" in the evening have to spend the night penned up like sheep within the remaining half of the room.

Immediately on entering the *Amdani Ghar* the priso-

ners have again to squat in pairs. If they are slightly late in sitting down or do not squat properly or if the lines are not straight, the convict-overseers beat them up mercilessly with their heavy brass-buckled belts.

Searching comes next. The prisoners' effects are scattered all over the place in the course of the search and some are "lost". But if anyone complains of the theft, he will be instantly greeted with slaps and blows and kicks. Everyone's clothes and body are searched, often stripping him virtually naked while a running commentary of horrible abuses involving the prisoner's female relations go on. After that they have to line up for food, but here the food line is less crowded because by that time, after the overwhelming experience of the day, quite a few prisoners have no craving for food left. Everyone is now anxious to get a sleeping place. But how are all those people to find sleeping room in that half of a room with a corner of it taken up by the latrine and the urinal? Quarrels often ensue resulting in fresh bouts of thrashing with belts, forcing the prisoners to sit or lie down just where they are. Such is the abject misery in which the prisoners spend the night in that choking and stinking half of the *Amdani Ghar*.

Another of the many devices for making the prisoners' lives utterly miserable is the "CRP search".

A gang consisting of a jamadar and 7 or 8 warders stride about everywhere in the Jail entering any ward they like and conducting a thorough search. The present leader of this CRP gang is Jamadar Garajnarain Singh who makes it his business to move about the prison all through the day looking for excuses to beat up prisoners. Even patients standing in the hospital queue are not spared this Garajnarain's danda.

Garajnarain and his gang make their appearance every day in the wards in which "dangerous" Naxalite prisoners are confined, ransacking and flinging about their beddings (i. e., blankets), pouring out the contents of every box and bag on the floor and examining the inside of every bottle and container.

Prisoners' bodies are also searched while they are made to stand in a row. On occasions, the prisoners are driven out of the wards, and the search conducted at will within closed doors. On coming back, the prisoners find many of their belongings missing, but any protest would be silenced with dandas. There is supposed to be a rule that no search can be made except in the presence of an officer, but it is never observed. Those of the prisoners' belongings specially liked by the warders and jamadars are taken away by the latter on various pretexts, sometimes under threat of the danda.

The Jail laws permit cigarettes and biris but not matches. The sepoys will snatch away any matches they might find in the hands of the prisoners. Some prisoners get supplies of tea and sugar from their relatives in a quite legal way, but they are not allowed to prepare the tea in the bowls and plates provided. If the sepoys come across any soot-blackened bowl they will instantly take it away. Possession of thread is lawful, but that of a needle unlawful. Anyone found having a needle will be beaten up and put in a cell. Three or four barbers come once a week to attened to hair and beards of 100 to 150 prisoners, the result being that many prisoners cannot have a shave or a hair-cut over long periods. But scissors and razor blades are absolutely prohibited inside the jail. The warders themselves provide prisoners with ganja, opium etc. and smoking implements, and the same warders may take them away in course of the search next day. They even demand cash penalty from those who are found with such articles. If the prisoners can provide it, well and good ; if they cannot, they might be thrashed and put in cells. There are times when, finding nothing else to grab, the warders tear off and take away the ropes on which the prisoners hang their clothes, because the rules donot permit ropes. Quite often they snatch away the prisoners' writing papers and exercise books even when they are officially stamped "Censored and passed", and the prisoners have a hard time getting them back from the jail office.

Thus, it is these warders and jamadars who run the prison

and rule the prisoners' lives. The officers sit serenely in their offices ; the prisoners cannot get anywhere near them, however they might try. They have absolutely no means of ventilating their grievances before the officers. Getting interviews with the Superintendent or the Jailor is quite out of the question. But it must be said that these gentlemen are most amiable. If somehow, by the rarest chance, a prisoner can reach one of these overlords and presents his grievances before him, the gracious overlord would at once dismiss him with a promise of redress. But the prisoner never gets a second opportunity of telling him that his assurances have not had the least effect.

Warders and jamadars wander about the Jail at all times, danda in hand, and beat up prisoners mercilessly on the least excuse. The filthy abuses they keep pouring on the prisoners, specially involving their mothers and sisters, form an integral part of their style of address. According to the Jail Code, warders or jamadars are not permitted to lay hands on prisoners, especially on the undertrials ; yet this rule is being broken everywhere and at every instant in the Jail. The Jailor or the Superintendent would feign wide-eyed wonder if told of such incidents by some outsider, as though he was listening to such amazing stuff for the first time in his life. But the fact is that this systematic tyranny committed by the warders in the Jail has been going on not only with their full permission but under their steady direction.

Those few among the warders and jamadars who are sympathetic towards prisoners cannot, for all their goodwill, behave well towards them or help them in any way. For in that case their jobs would be at stake. There have been plenty of cases of warders being transferred to jails at distant inconvenient stations as a penalty for behaving well towards prisoners, particularly, political prisoners.

Such is the reality of the Presidency Jail, one of the most "democratic" jails in the world's biggest "democracy".

December 8-22, 1973

WOMEN PRISONERS

A REPORTER

No report on jails in West Bengal can be complete without taking into its scope the peculiar form of atrocities, mental and physical, to which women prisoners, political and non-political, are subjected. There are hundreds of young and old inmates, in the female wards of the Presidency, Midnapore, Behrampore and Liluah jails.

The female ward of Presidency Jail, Alipore, Calcutta, will be focused in this report; but this does not mean that the other female wards of prisons are any better. This ward is situated in the extreme corner of the Jail. During lock-up hours, the entire ward, including the warders on duty, are shut in by the Bara Jamadar from the outside. It is known among the prisoners as "a jail within a jail". During an emergency the only way to establish contact with the rest of the jail is to shout to the wall guards on duty between the two main walls. The rest depends on the whims of the wall guards or the warders.

Very often, emergencies of a medical nature arise. A woman is about to deliver ; a child contracts some fatal disease and lies unconscious ; a violent brawl takes place between prisoners. It is only because the political prisoners, who are confined to cells near the wall, take the responsibility of calling out to the wall guards that the doctor or the Bara Jamadar ever arrives on the scene. Very often it is too late because the doctors rarely remain on night duty at the Hospital.

The female ward is divided into three main sections. To the extreme right is the "Pagol Bari" (Mad House) which normally contains 175—200 inmates in different stages of insanity ; some CL (Criminal Lunatics) and others NCL (Non-Criminal Lunatics). Anyone with common sense will realise that this is a very crude categorisation, and the Pagla Reviewing Committee which comprises several doctors as well as the social wel-

fare officer of the female ward must be aware of the fact, especially with their first-hand knowledge of the conditions in the insane ward. Are they callous ? Or are they crippled by a corrupt bureaucracy ?

The Pagol Bari has three large and four small cells. The first two large cells are filled with NCL cases—over a hundred young women, stripped of all clothing, playing with each other's excreta, eating it, pelting the passers-by and decorating themselves with it. The next large cell is for those in various stages of recovery. In the next four isolation cells, very often three or four CL cases are lumped together in a single cell, with terrible consequences. In February 1973, two CL cases who had been put together with a recovering NCL case smashed the latter's head on the stone floor till she died. The brawl was over an orange. The warder on night duty had taken the count as usual and left in the morning. It was only when the day warder arrived that the murder was discovered. The doctor on duty refused to give a death certificate. The matrons were in a panic—there was to be a legal enquiry and the body lay in the tiny female hospital for two days and nights till the matter was hushed up by the Superintendent, Mr B. J. Das, and the body was removed to the morgue.

These helpless lunatics are treated brutally by the convicts who are the matron's satellites, some of them being more ferocious and powerful than the matron herself. One of these convicts, Renu, was in charge of the Pagol Bari. A huge, muscular and ruthless woman, she disciplined the lunatics with blows and kicks. Very often victims of a brawl, or of Renu's rod, they would be brought half dead and bleeding into the hospital.

The doctors, as advised by the authorities, assign a first-class diet for almost all the inhabitants of the insane ward in view of their terrible physical conditions. This means meat, fish, eggs, bread, butter, fruit and milk—but do they, or any other prisoner ever see this diet ? Most of them subsist on plain rice and salt ; even the dal and vegetables which the

other prisoners eat are denied to them. The result is that they are reduced to a subhuman condition and one very rarely sees any lunatic being released or cured. One often sees them being taken into hospitals—skeletal figures with sores and bruises all over their bodies ; one hears their voices at night begging and screaming for water and in the morning one sees them huddled, in a torn grey blanket dying or already dead.

The most feared lunatic in the female ward is Kshiroda. She lives in a cell in the main section, outside the insane ward. Khiroda is a CL case ; the children call her "Rakkoshi". She is said to have murdered and drunk the blood of her own children. How far this is true is not known, but outside her cell one often finds the carcases of pigeons and cats which she has stealthily caught and eaten. In early 1972, she enticed a starved little child to her cell with a piece of bread, bit the child's fingers and began to suck blood. She was beaten off and the child saved but no attempt has been made to remove her to a better place or to try and cure her.

The next two isolation cells are occupied by two NCL cases, both victims of acute T.B. and therefore isolated. None of these cells ever gets the sun and the women are always squatting on the doorway for food or water ; never taken out of their cells, they can no longer stand upright. Strange methods of psychotherapy and medicine !

The central section of female ward comprises the hospital, the dal ghar, the hajati ghar and the cell building in front of which there is some open space where ordinary prisoners are allowed to move about outside lock-up hours.

The hospital is run by the senior and junior matron assisted by the convicts. Doctors from the male hospital visit the female hospital from time to time. Their entire consultation is guided by the matrons and therefore only the favourites, i.e. those who pander to their whims in the hope of getting some extra food, ever get any medical attention. Most of the petty-case prisoners, those arrested for prostitution, theft, rice smuggling etc. are afraid of the lathis of the warders and the

blows of the convicts and never dare come anywhere near the hospital. Those who are bolder and ask for diet are swiftly enrolled into the matrons' enchanted circle or are deprived the moment the doctor's back is turned. The doctors and the matrons generally "overlook" these matters. Complicity ?

It is doubtful whether the junior or senior matrons are equipped to act in the manner that the diverse medical problems of the female wards demand.

The hospital is the centre of every kind of corruption. A special feature of this ward and in all the other female wards elsewhere is the prostitution racket. This racket is run with the active participation of the police and the court clerks and a section of the convicts. The prostitutes are rarely involved because they themselves have been driven to prostitution through extreme need. The unlicensed are very often victimised by the police and the court clerks to pay enormous bribes to avoid arrests. Those who are arrested hardly stay in jail long enough to get involved in any fresh crime ; yet the jail police and court authorities use them as scapegoats to explain away the vicious circle of prostitution into which many young girls who enter jail are trapped.

Who are the real ringleaders ? Certainly a few of the convicts, especially the "kutney cases". ("Kutneys" sell girls as prostitutes. Very ruthless, they resort to kidnapping, blackmail and other forms of coercion to secure girls for customers who pay anything from Rs. 200 to Rs. 2,000 to buy a girl. They also do illegal abortions and midwivery. A "kutney" usually gets a heavy sentence, often being involved in murder, and as convict she assumes the most important responsibilities in the female ward and acts as the most faithful servitor of the jail authorities.) These convicts keep their eyes open for simple young girls and bring them under their patronage through favours and bribes. These girls are usually in a hurry to be out of jail. The convicts, and in certain jails the warders, have connections with the courts. As soon as a

suitable young girl has been enticed with the prospect of release, she is bailed out by certain court clerks and handed over to a client. It takes a very smart and perceptive young girl to untangle herself from these coils. Since nothing in this society makes a girl particularly smart and perceptive, very soon she is the hapless victim of the "underworld".

The third sectlon of the female ward is reserved solely for girls belonging to the CPI(ML). Those with cell-orders are confined to the top floor of the cell building. They are never allowed to come downstairs and are constantly guarded by warders. The other girls are cut off completely from the rest of the ward and are only allowed out during interviews or court dates. A jail within a jail within a jail ! These girls are deliberately isolated by the jail authorities as advised by the matron and the warders. This group often protests against the robbery of prisoners' food and medicines in the hospital. The jailor usually pleads ignorance of these goings on, as do all the other jail officials. But they find it safer to keep these girls out of the way. They harrass them in many ways to keep them quiet. They are deprived of food, medicines and adequate clothing, forced into lock-up much earlier and taken out from lock-up much later than the rest of the ward. They are bullied psychologically. In 1972, a pregnant girl arrived in jail. The matron and the warders made sly innuendo about the legitimacy of her child. She was transferred to P. G. hospital for delivery. On return to jail, the baby was twice on the verge of death owing to the insanitary conditions. Later, she was forced to send the baby to her mother. Another girl, whose husband was shot dead, is often taunted about the fact that she still wears coloured saris in spite of being a widow. Yet another, who was raped by the police, is teased about the loss of her virginity.

Very often brute force is resorted to, especially when these vigilant girls detect some fresh instance of thievery. Shikha Chatterjee, a prisoner who is the matron's right hand and one of the ringleaders of the hospital clique is the most aggressive

and brutal in her assaults on the political girls, as is Bijoya, a senior warder, who is renowned for her indiscriminate use of the lathi.

Last month, one of these girls was beaten brutally by Shikha on her way back from court. As every one was in lock-up it was impossible to protect her. The incident was followed by a written demand from the girls to the jail authorities to look into the affairs of the hospital. Later the girls were provoked and beaten up mercilessly by the convicts. This kind of incident occurs every few months.

Far from setting any prisoner on the way to a normal life, the jails, courts and police in this country perpetuate and complement the life of the "underworld".

February 16, 1974

Andhra Pradesh

'CONSPIRATORIAL' WRITERS

C. VENKATAKRISHNA

In the morning of May 22, 1974, All India Radio of Hyderabad announced that P. Varavara Rao and Charabanda Raju, both members of the Revolutionary Writers' Association, have been arrested. Varavara Rao had been arrested a few months ago under the MISA along with two other comrades. They were released by the High Court of Andhra Pradesh which allowed the writ petition filed by them. The latest swoop of the Government was not known for a day or two. Later it turned out that several other important writers like T. Madhusudhan Rao, Secretary of the RWA, M. Ranganathan, editor of '*Pilupu*' and M. T. Khan, publisher of '*Pilupu*' have also been arrested. Prosecution alleges that they were involved in a case of conspiracy filed against K. G. Satyamoorty, K. Sitaramiah and 44 others. It is alleged that

K. Sitaramiah, one of the leaders of the conspiracy along with other accused, operated from New Bhoiguda and other places in the twin cities of Secunderabad and Hyderabad ; that the arrested writers took up the work of indoctrinating the students and unemployed youth cadres in villages and of aiding the other accused in carrying out the objects of the conspiracy, for which they wrote and published revolutionary material of highly objectionable and inflammatory nature, calculated to bring into hatred and contempt and tending to excite disaffection towards the Government etc. Prosecution further alleges that they, under the guise of "Viplava Sahitya Gosty," encouraged revolutionary activities in the struggle area for the implementation of the "armed struggle programme" and further held study circles and meetings to educate the people about the ideology of violence, etc.

June 22, 1974.

Letter

WHERE DO THEY GO ?

A large number of people including tribal men and women have been arrested in connection with the incident of 'Police-Naxalite encounter' in the Kamalpur village of Burdwan, near the Hooghly border. The police are refusing to tell anybody where they are being held. It is heard that they have been brought to Calcutta at Lalbazar Police HQ and instead of being produced before the court they are being brutally tortured in the lock-up. A considerable section of the local people suspect that many of them have either been killed or are going to be. And that is why the police are refusing to disclose their whereabouts and not producing them before court. At the same time, widespread police repression is going on in Kamalpur village.

On 20.6.1974, the police arrested two young women and one young man from Bus No. 3 at Uttarpara. They are refusing to tell even their relatives in which P. S. they have been kept. Nor are they being produced in court. One of the girls is named Krishna Banerjee.

The poilce are arresting many more young boys and girls and refusing to tell their whereabouts.

PROMODE SENGUPTA
Secretary, APDR, Calcutta

July 20, 1974

DETENTION CONDITIONS IN WEST BENGAL JAILS

Prepared by the Research Department of Amnesty International on the basis of newspaper reports and individual statements made to Amnesty International.

Numbers : Amnesty estimates that at the moment, between 15,000 and 20,000 prisoners are being held in West Bengal for their alleged involvement in extremist left-wing political activities. Last year the West Bengal Home Minister stated in the State Assembly that the total number of "prisoners arrested for being Naxalites was 17,787 (*Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 17 March 1973). On 1 January this year, *The Statesman* reported that 2,000 are held under the Defence of India Rules (DIR) and the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA). According to this report, more than 17,800 are, in addition, held as "Under Trial" prisoners, but the majority have now been detained for two or more years without trial. Some of them have been so detained for nearly five years. On their release, prisoners held under preventive detention laws are often reported to be re-arrested either under different clauses of the same laws or charged with specific criminal offences. Thus, although the Supreme

Court of India ruled on 19 April 1973 that the special detention powers under Article 17A of the MISA (extending the period of preventive detention to 21 months) were illegal, and ordered the release of 1,760 prisoners who had been detained under this provision, nearly all of these prisoners remained in detention, either under different section of the same Act or on criminal charges.

Apart from being held under preventive detention laws, prisoners are also detained on a variety of serious criminal charges, but often released before actually having been tried. Such was the case, for example, with Dr Gholam Yazdani, physician and former member of the United Front Government of W. Bengal, arrested in 1971. He was released in December 1973, without having been tried. Prisoners tried and not found guilty on one charge are often immediately rearrested on different charges. Thus, it was reported to Amnesty that Karun Mukherjee, Gour Banerjee and Nag, all Naxalite suspects, had been arrested in 1970-71 and were since detained charged with murder and illegally carrying arms and explosives. In October 1973, the Calcutta magistrate pronounced a verdict of not-guilty on their case, but the prisoners were rearrested within the court premises and taken into police custody on charges of robbery. After their release, prisoners, even if cleared of all charges brought against them, are often put under 'restrictions' i.e. have to report regularly to the police, whereas according to a number of statements made to Amnesty, restrictions are being imposed on their movements and political activities.

Prison Conditions : Many jails are grossly overcrowded ; at the moment Alipore Special Jail, Presidency Jail in Calcutta and Jamshedpur Jail in Bihar are among the prisons containing more than the official capacity. This has made it difficult for the prisoners to obtain certain essential facilities. Accounts from ex-prisoners received by Amnesty indicate that hygiene conditions in most jails are bad. According to a recent report, in Calcutta Presidency Jail, only one watertap is available for 150-200 prisoners, and in the dry season it is often difficult to ob-

tain drinking water for the inmates. In Alipore Special Jail, there is only one watertap for 700 prisoners. In some other jails, prisoners reportedly have to take drinking water from ponds where other prisoners bathe and wash their clothes. Under Trial prisoners are kept in wards of 80-100 inmates which are dark and airless, prisoners are locked up from 5-30 in the evening until 6-30 a.m. without any sanitary facilities. In the morning, prisoners are allowed out for two hours to have meals, wash and use lavatory facilities.

Although Presidency Jail is one of the few prisons with a sick ward, very few prisoners are admitted to the ward. Medical facilities are scarce, and skin diseases, particularly scabies, are widespread. Amnesty has been told that in some cases, despite recommendations from jail doctors, no permission was given for prisoners to be treated in outside hospitals. Of the cases reported to Amnesty, one was of Ramal Roy Chowdhuri, arrested in October 1970, who allegedly had been tortured and whom the jail doctors had recommended for outside treatment, which was never given. The prisoner is said to have died in April 1972, on the day of his "Special Release" from jail. Another prisoner, Azizul Haque, is said to be seriously ill following alleged torture during police interrogation which left him partly paralysed. Despite doctors' recommendations for outside treatment, he remains in jail.

Punishment in Prisons : Amnesty has been particularly concerned about the use of bar fetters ("Danda-beri" and "Shikli-beri") on prisoners regarded as dangerous or as security risks. While such fetters seem to be used in West Bengal jails, reports of this have reached Amnesty also from Bihar, especially. Fifty-one alleged Naxalite prisoners are kept in chains in Hazaribagh Jail, some of them for periods of more than two years. The fetters are kept on day and night, according to the Jailor of of Hazaribagh Jail, "to avoid further trouble". They consist of an iron ring on each ankle, each of which is attached to an iron bar some 20 inches long, the bar being connected to another one connected to the waist. One of the prisoners recen-

tly on hunger strike, Ashim Chatterjee, was chained for a period of two years. It was also reported to Amnesty that the same prisoner had spent two years in solitary confinement. Another case known to Amnesty is that of Shaibal Roy detained in the same jail, who contracted tuberculosis during imprisonment. After having received hospital treatment, he was returned to jail and put in irons again. Prisoners held in this condition in Hazaribagh Jail spend 24 hours locked-up with four or five in a cell, which they may only leave to use the lavatory. The use of bar fetters is also reported from other Jails : in Calcutta Presidency Jail prisoners are allegedly kept in fetters for periods of three to six months or even longer. Such treatment is contrary to Rule 33 of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners—even for those who are convicted.

Torture Allegations : Over the past three years, a number of torture allegations have reached Amnesty from legal sources in Calcutta. According to these reports, torture is frequently applied during police interrogation, both in the Special Police office (14 Lord Sinha Road, Calcutta) and in the Lal Bazar Police Station in Calcutta. Allegations for torture include severe beatings—to the extent of fractured limbs—prisoners being hung upside down and pins and nails being inserted into their nails and other sensitive organs of the body, including the genitals. In a number of cases the use of modern electric shock methods is reported, and prisoners are also allegedly burned with cigarettes, extinguished on their skin. According to the same reports, appropriate medical treatment was denied to prisoners who had suffered such treatment, which resulted in their being partly paralyzed (as in the case of Azizul Haque and Megharanjan Sen Gupta, detained in Presidency Jail). In the case of Ramal Roy Chowdhuri (mentioned earlier) who died after his release, it was reported that his death was due to inadequate medical treatment following police torture.

Allegations of torture of women have most recently been made in a report by the "Nikhil Banga Mahila Samiti" (All

Bengal Women's Association). Some members of the Association were detained in May this year, together with some 25 female Naxalite suspects, whom Amnesty estimates now to be detained in Calcutta's Presidency Jail. According to members of the Association, these women were taken to Lal Bazar Police Station one month after their original arrest. When failing to supply the wanted information they were stripped naked, burned with cigarettes on all parts of the body, and in some cases, iron rulers were inserted into the rectum and vagina. When recovered, these women would, according to this report, be taken to Lal Bazar for the same treatment after 20-22 days.

Although Amnesty has not been able to make an investigation of the majority of these allegations, Amnesty representatives have talked to a small number of ex-prisoners who allege that they have been tortured. In at least one case, the Amnesty representative was able to establish that the right hand of an ex-prisoner was paralyzed and could find no reason to question his statement that this was caused by severe beating during police interrogation : this prisoner was a lawyer who had been detained in January 1970 on three criminal charges, and, after he had been acquitted of all the charges, was released in June 1973 on the condition that he report regularly to the police and not engage in political activities.

Jail Incidents : According to official figures which appeared in *The Statesman*, *The Times of India* and the *Jugantar*, 88 prisoners were killed in 12 jail incidents during the period December 1970 to June 1972 in West Bengal and Bihar alone. Unofficial reports from ex-prisoners which have reached Amnesty put the number of prisoners who died in these encounters between prisoners and the jail staff and police at three times that figure. Only in a limited number of these incidents was any official enquiry ordered to take place, e.g. as in the case of the 26 July 1971 Hazaribagh incident in which 16 people died. While no official report on these incidents has ever been published as far as we know, *The Times of India* and *The Statesman* of 4 August 1971 stated that

"Preliminary enquiry held by the Commissioner of the Chotanagpur Division and the Deputy Commissioner for Hazaribagh also shows that the remaining 12 inmates died of injuries caused by convicts and officers". Regarding the incident at Asansol Jail which took place on 7 August 1971, *The Statesman* also reported : "about Thursday's incident in Asansol Jail, it was learnt that all the nine killed had been beaten to death."

Such reports cast serious doubts on one common official explanation : that the prisoners were shot while trying to escape from prison.

Legal Aid : While article 22(i) of the Indian Constitution confers the right to every citizen to be informed as soon as possible about the grounds for his arrest, and right to consult a lawyer, the main complaint of the Legal Aid Committee in Calcutta—a committee of lawyers whose aim is to extend legal aid to political prisoners—is that members of the Committee are often denied access to their clients in prison. Letters written by prisoners to the Committee have, in a number of cases, not reached their destination ; while prisoners, when they have a lawyer often complain that they cannot meet their counsel in jail and can only see him for the first time when they are actually brought to court. Whereas the work of the Legal Aid Committee in the High Court has been fairly successful, a report from the Committee issued in November 1973 mention that "The Committee moved 200 bail petitions in different courts in West Bengal (in 135 Under Trial cases and 52 MISA cases). Bail was granted to six Under Trial prisoners and 46 prisoners held under the MISA. Still now, only six prisoners have been released". Like many of the political prisoners in West Bengal, they were rearrested under different charges immediately after their release had been ordered by the Court.

September 21, 1974 [*Abridged*]

GATHERING CLOUDS OF A POLICE RAJ

SUBHASH CHANDRA SARKER

In independent India no other expenditure has perhaps increased as fast as that on the police. In the course of the twenty-four years from 1950-51 to 1974-75 the expenditure on the police (of the Central Government alone) rose by as much as fifty-two times—from a reasonable Rs. 3 crores in 1950-51 to the threatening sum of Rs. 156.40 crores in the budget estimate of 1974-75. The spurt in the increase in police expenditure by the Central Government could be traced to the time of assumption of power by Mrs Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister in January 1966. In 1966-67 the expenditure on police was Rs. 48.27 crores. But in the course of the very next year it rose by an amazing fifty per cent to Rs. 72.60 crores, in 1968-69. It is perhaps not without significance that the years 1967-68 and 1968-69 were also the years of the temporary eclipse of the Congress party which while retaining power at the Centre, had to yield power to non-Congress parties at one time in as many as seven States of the Union. It was from the moment when the State governments (non-Congress), depended the least on the Central Government for the maintenance of law and order that the central expenditure on police increased by leaps and bounds—indicating a desire on the part of the Central Government to require additional strength for policing purposes—if need be against the wishes of the State governments. In 1971-72 the Central expenditure on police reached the figure of Rs. 118.82 crores—nearly two and a half times that of the amount five years earlier. And in the budget of the current year the allocation is for Rs. 156.40 crores which is sure to grow by the time the financial year comes to an end.

At the same time the expenditure of the State governments on the police has been increasing even almost as fast—doubling

every ten years or so. This expenditure already exceeds that on general administration. Thus, in 1971-72 the State governments spent Rs. 244.33 crores on the police, compared with Rs. 210.67 crores on general administration and Rs. 57.57 crores on justice and jails—and Rs. 183.81 crores on medical and public health and Rs. 351.64 crores on primary education. In the next five years ending in March 1979, the State governments are expected to incur a total expenditure of Rs. 1,816.08 crores on the police. In view of the rising incidence of expenditure on account of increased dearness allowance granted by almost all the State governments to their employees in the wake of the rise in the level of prices, there is no doubt that the actual expenditure on police would be much more than what is estimated. In 1978-79, the per capita expenditure on police in the States of India (exclusive of the expenditure of the Central Government on police) would be Rs. 7.63 compared with an expected average per capita expenditure of Rs. 6.73 on medical and public health. Among the States, Maharashtra shows the highest expenditure on police during the Fifth Five Year Plan—the expected amount being Rs. 258.45 crores, followed by Uttar Pradesh Rs. 222.30 crores, West Bengal Rs. 214.91 crores, Madhya Pradesh Rs. 137.18 crores, Bihar Rs. 135.73 crores, Gujarat Rs. 116.92 crores and Andhra Pradesh Rs. 118.63 crores. Expenditure on police in no other State would exceed Rs. 100 crores during the Fifth Plan period.

Although the State governments are spending more and more on the police, the Central Government justifies its action in creating a larger police force under its control. The Secretary of the Union Home Ministry said, "We feel these are all thoroughly justified and our present experience also is in line with that. Not a month passes in which we do not have pressing requests from State governments on account of one trouble or the other and it is a fairly intricate task of operation and control to ensure the optimum deployment, as it were, of the forces available". If the validity of such an explanation

for increasing the expenditure on the Central police force were to be conceded, the logical conclusion would be that the increasing expenditure incurred by the State governments on the State police was utterly infructuous and wasteful. It is not extraordinary to find the Public Accounts Committee of the Parliament expressing grave anxiety over the matter. In its report, the Committee expressed the view "that expenditure on police organisations of different kinds has been increasing at such a rapid rate that it calls for an urgent review by an independent high-powered commission. The expenditure on police both at the Centre and in the States has reached levels where clearly they are eroding the resources available for developmental activities. The Committee trust that Government will take a decision in this matter and appoint the commission within the next two or three months." This report was presented to the Lok Sabha on 30 April, 1974. Almost six months have passed since then. But the Government of India is yet to announce the appointment of such a commission to scrutinise the justifiability of this huge outlay on the police.

A large part of this outlay in recent years has been due to the phenomenal growth in the strength of the Central Reserve Police (CRP) and the Border Security Force (BSF). A third element has been the emergence of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) which grew ten-fold in four years. The strength of the CRP has risen from 16 battalions in 1964-65 to 60 today. According to the Secretary of the Union Home Ministry, the increase was nothing extra-ordinary to be commented upon. "In fact, we in the Home Ministry think that we could have done with some more increase, but we have tried to manage with the least level we could manage with", the Secretary is on record to have said. The expenditure on CRP went up from Rs. 13.57 crores in 1968-69 to Rs. 38.78 crores in 1973-74.

From an account of the frequency of deployment of the CRP in 1973 it is seen that out of 82 deployments in the year as many as 58 were made in the non-Hindi-speaking States and

24 in Hindi-speaking States. But 56 per cent of the total strength of the CRP was drawn from the five Hindi-speaking States of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Perhaps in the linguistic imbalance lies the root of much of the complaints of barbarism against the men of the CRP who had to cope not only with the ordinary difficulties of policemen in an unrestful society but also with the additional handicap of a communication gap due to ignorance of the languages of the locality where thc CRP men have been generally employed. This poses a peculiar danger to the integrity of the country. For in a clash between the public and the police, which is unfortunately a matter of daily occurrence, resentment grows only against the police. But if the offending police and the suffering public speak different languages, as is bound to be the case under the existing state of affairs (where West Bengal deployed the largest number of CRP men in each of the three years 1970-71, 1971-72 and 1972-73 but contributed only 1.97 per cent of the CRP strength), the danger of linguistic riots breaking out would become very real and to that extent national unity will be impaired.

The CRP has also become involved in political controversy. In 1968-69, on three occasions CRP units had been sent to Kerala and West Bengal without any request coming from any of these governments and in one instance, CRP unit had not been withdrawn even when the State Government concerned (West Bengal) had asked for its withdrawal. This may also have contributed to the acts of irresponsible conduct of which the CRP men are being increasingly accused all over the country. One instance of such conduct was seen in Cooch Behar in the northern part of West Bengal when the CRP firing on 27 August resulted in the death of a school teacher and severe injuries to others. According to an editorial in *The Hindusthan Standard* of Calcutta : "In Cooch Behar there was no justification for the police firing on a group of school students who were protesting against the highhanded

manner in which the CRP were dealing with the driver and assistant of a bus that had earlier collided with a police van." (Calcutta, 29 August, 1974)

Expenditure on the Border Security Force more than doubled between 1968-69 (when it was Rs. 25.44 crores) and 1974-75 (in the budget for which a provision of Rs. 57.41 crores has been made). The Public Accounts Committee was sceptical about the justification for this growing expenditure in view of the fact that there is a large standing army whose duty it is to protect the boundaries of the country. "Moreover till 1968 the State forces were successfully guarding the border. There is an appreciable rise in expenditure even after the cessation of hostilities on the eastern border where we have now a friendly border..... This calls for an explanation", the Committee observed.

The Central Industrial Security Force was created in 1969-70. It grew in strength rapidly and accounted for 10,220 men in 1971-72. In the following year its strength increased by more than fifty per cent to 15,545 men. The sanctioned strength is 17,330. It has been inducted into 71 public sector undertakings. The Public Accounts Committee has called upon the Central Government to "review the entire position to see whether it is necessary to have such a large number of forces, each created for performing limited functions in addition to the one responsible for overall maintenance of law and order and protecting government properties."

What deserves particular attention is that each of these three cases of the expansion or creation of the Central police force—CRP, BSF and CISF—impinges on the functioning of the State police force and opens a scope for considerable confusion. Already the Centre-State relations in the country have been bedevilled because of what the Sixth Finance Commission has described as the Central Government's proneness "to encumber themselves with routine administrative and supervisory functions". The wisdom of further queering the pitch through the duplication of police forces is

not beyond question. The Centre-State Relations Inquiry Committee headed by the former Chief Justice of Madras High Court, Mr P. V. Rajamanner, observed : "The State police should be relied on for maintenance of peace within the State. The interference of the Union in the upkeep of law and order seems to be contrary to the provision of the Constitution. Even Article 355 in the sense in which it has in our opinion to be interpreted cannot enable the Union to station the Central Reserve Police for the day-to-day policing of the areas of a State, a function allotted in its entirety to the State by the Constitution. We are of the view that the Central Reserve Police should not be sent to any State except at the request or with the consent of the State". (Report of the Centre-State Relations Inquiry Committee, 1971, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, page 190). This is all the more applicable to the CISF.

From 1969-70 onward the Government of India has provided Rs 19.80 crores to the States on loan-cum-grants basis for the purpose of modernisation of the police forces through (a) providing modes of faster transport, (b) providing them with better communication facilities such as VHF wireless transmitting-cum-receiving sets, and (c) equipping them with forensic science laboratories. "In fact", the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, told the Public Accounts Committee, "we now give assistance of roughly 5 lakhs towards the building part and there is no limit for the other parts". On 31 March 1974, the States were due to repay the Central Government Rs. 12.82 crores as loan for modernisation of the police force. The State-wise break-up of the amount of outstanding loans, which perhaps also indicates the thrust of police expenditure in various States, shows that West Bengal was the heaviest debtor with Rs 1.80 crores to pay back, followed by Rajasthan (Rs. 1.38 crores), Orissa (Rs. 1.28 crores), Tamil Nadu (Rs. 1.21 crores), Madhya Pradesh (Rs. 1 crore), Maharashtra (Rs. 91 lakhs) and Kerala (Rs. 81 lakhs). Other States each had an outstanding of less than

Rs 80 lakhs. On the same date the total amount due to the Central Government from State Government as loans for police housing was Rs. 48.08 crores of which again West Bengal accounted for the largest amount (Rs. 6.02 crores), followed by Maharastra (Rs. 4 crores), Madhya Pradesh (Rs. 3.88 crores), Andhra Pradesh (Rs. 3.69 crores), Uttar Pradesh (Rs. 3.68 crores), Tamil Nadu (Rs. 3.59 crores), Karnataka (Rs. 3.05 crores), Rajasthan (Rs 3.04 crores), Kerala (Rs. 2.88 crores), Orissa (Rs. 2.41 crores), Bihar (Rs. 2.38 crores), Jammu and Kashmir (Rs. 2.18 crores), and Gujarat (Rs. 2.10 crores). Assam had an outstanding loan on this account of Rs. 1.99 crores, Punjab Rs. 1.21 crores and Haryana Rs. 1.12 crores. Other States had an outstanding of less than Rs. 1 crore each. However, this substantial amount already spent does not seem to have enhanced police capacity to deal with anti-social criminals, although it must be conceded that political opponents now do get a much rougher treatment than a few years ago.

The justification for the increased outlay on the police has been questioned not by members of the Parliament alone. Even the former Director-General of the Central Reserve Police (CRP) which has acquired an unenviable notoriety for its misconduct all over India, has raised this question. Mr V. G. Kanetkar was the first full-time Inspector-General of the Central Reserve Police (CRP), in which capacity he joined on 28 June, 1963. There were 12 battalions then. He was subsequently made the Director-General of CRP. He left the CRP (and also retired from Government service after 35 years and $7\frac{1}{2}$ months) on 15 September, 1969. By that time, in the CRP there were 52 battalions, a group centre, four training institutions and also three signal battalions under a wireless adviser attached to the Directorate-General. There were two Inspectors-General, three Deputy Directors and seven Deputy Inspectors-General. Having worked so vigorously and effectively for strengthening the CRP, Mr Kanetkar raises the question, if it is a thing of pride that a large reserve police force had to be maintained in the country. Mr Kanetkar

writes, "In a span of ten years the Force expanded from one Bn. to 52 Bns. with ancillary institutions. This solid increase created thousands of new posts and upgraded quite a few excluding that of the head, but whenever I pondered over this transformation, I could not help comparing it with the opening, with fanfare, of a new maternity home in the middle of a family planning drive. The necessity to augment the strength of the Force was felt because conditions in the country were causing concern and it was argued that if troubles at different spots had to be contained, the CRP must have enough strength to be available for despatch anywhere in aid of the local police. Was it then a thing of pride that a huge reserve had to be created only because the internal situation was deteriorating ?" (V. G. Kanetkar, *Vales of Crime*, Bombay, 1971, p. 159).

The same question applies to the growth in the strength of the police force as a whole, which has necessarily diverted funds from much-needed national endeavours to a purely unproductive occupation.

October 19, 1974

Kerala

NAXALITE PRISONERS IN KERALA

A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

This Report is based on personal interviews, communications and investigations and is concerned with the Naxalite prisoners in the Central Jail, Trivandrum.

The moment a cadre is arrested he is asked to remove his shirt and throughout his interrogation he is forced to remain in this half-clad state. The idea is to humiliate and intimidate him, especially so when everyone around him is not even in ordinary dress but in uniform. The police van which is used

to transfer the cadre from the point of his arrest to the interrogation centre contains more than enough seats for all the policemen and the cadre to sit down upon ; but the police insist upon the cadre sitting down on the floor of the van. Once the vehicle starts to move the beatings begin. With the cadre in the centre as their target the policemen on the side-seats use their boots, rifle-butts, and lathis on him. All this is accompanied by the most abusive threats that can be imagined. The policemen in this case are ordinary constables. The officer who makes the arrest occupies the front seat next to the driver, and he has no hand in this beating-up except as a silent appreciator. The interrogation centre is headed by an officer of the rank of Superintendent of Police. The police department which runs this centre and heads the anti-Naxalite operations in the State is variously known as the Special Branch, the Crime Branch, and the Anti-Naxalite Squad. The officer in overall charge is J. Padikkal, a member of the IPS. Below him are two Deputy SPs, Laxmana and Murali Krishnadas. The former was the officer in charge of the police hunt which led to the torture and murder of Verghese, one of the leaders of the Naxalite movement in north Kerala. At that time, even the Right CPI was moved by the horror and anger which this murder provoked among the public, to appeal to Chief Minister, Achutha Menon, to investigate the incident. As with all troublesome investigations this too was helped to die a natural death, and the Deputy SP, Laxmana, is now so enthusiastic about his job, that one of his favourite gambits during interrogations is to aim the barrel of a rifle at the face of a cadre and ask him, "You...Do you know what happened to Verghese." As if, the whole of Kerala does not know !

The Deputy SPs are assisted by two sub-inspectors (who have now been promoted to the rank of Circle-Inspectors), Alex and Shanmugathasan. It is this group of officers who interrogate, i.e. torture the political prisoners at the interrogation centre. Previously this centre used to be housed in a rented

building in Pottakuzhi, a suburb of Trivandrum. Recently it has been shifted to Shasthamangalam, an upper-class residential area in Trivandrum. From the outside the interrogation centre presents the picture of a well-built house. Inside the building all the rooms are usually kept open, but there is no question of escaping since the place is heavily guarded. As soon as the cadre arrives at the interrogation centre he is pushed into any one of the rooms. The rooms do not contain any furniture. The floor serves as chair, table and bed. Either the cadre is interrogated in that room itself or taken to some other room. But he is never kept for long in one particular room or is interrogated by one particular person.

'*Interrogation*' : Interrogation is just a high-sounding anti-septic name for plain, murderous torture. Torture is inflicted at many levels. The level varies according to the resilience of the cadre, his importance, and more than all, according to the sadistic tendencies of the torturers.

In a personal interview a cadre told me how he was constantly beaten up by groups of officers from 8 in the evening to 4.30 in the morning. At about 8, two officers, a Deputy SP and a sub-inspector came in, accompanied by three to four constables and a writer. The officers sat on chairs and the cadre was forced to kneel down in front of them. The constables kept to the side of the kneeling cadre. The writer sat slightly away with an open book and pen to note down anything that the cadre would say in reply to questions. The questions were mainly political, organisational and to a lesser extent, personal. Each answer was followed by abuse, a slap on the face or a kick in the stomach. And as the session progressed, rifle-butts, lathis, and fists were used. Sometimes the cadre would faint. They would revive him with water and begin again. At about 10, this particular cadre was taken to another room where a fresh group of officers tortured him, asking him the same questions. This took place until 4.30 in the morning. By then the cadre was unrecognisable due to swellings, bruises and blood.

Yet another interesting case-history is that of P. T. Thomas, formerly of the Accountant General's Office, Trivandrum. He was arrested from his lodge ; an arrest which was witnessed by quite a few people. Since the police considered him one of the top leaders of the CPI (M-L) they tortured him ruthlessly. And when things did not work out to their satisfaction they blindfolded him and injected him with sodium pentathol. Why did they blindfold him ? Obviously, to prevent him from recognizing the man who administered the drug to him. One suspects that even members of the medical profession are in league with these torturers ; a suspicion that will be confirmed again and again in the course of this report. Meanwhile, the A G's Office Union, of which Thomas was an activist, filed a habeas corpus in the court. The police responded by saying that they had no idea of his whereabouts, that the said person was actually absconding and therefore the police were also looking for him. But after the merciless torture and the drugging, Thomas was in no condition to be brought before a court. He was quickly taken to a nursing home in Ambasamudram in Tamil Nadu for medical treatment. This again reveals the complicity of some members of the medical profession in the skullduggery of the police. After this the police took him to Marina Beach in Madras City and let him out of the van with one rupee in hand. A few minutes later, P. T. Thomas, wanted by the Kerala Police, was spotted and arrested by the Madras City Police. Hours later, he was produced before a magistrate who remanded him to custody ; and the ordinary newspaper readers were amazed at the quickness with which the police had traced and arrested an absconding person.

Central Jail, Trivandrum : At the Central Jail, political prisoners are treated even worse than hardcase convicts.

Provoked by the fascist oppression, the Naxalites went on a hunger-strike which lasted 16 days in 1971. At the conclusion of the strike they managed to wrest certain rights from the jail administration. But still they were not allowed to read or write,

and to secure this right they had to go on another hunger-strike which lasted 20 days. So far all protest actions by the Naxalites have been peaceful to the extreme. Yet all these peaceful protest movements have had to face violent suppression at the hands of the jail authorities. One such instance is the incident of October 25, 1972 in the Central Jail.

The main demand that the Naxalites have raised is that they should be treated as political prisoners. The peaceful protest of October 25 was based on this demand. On that day, except for eleven undertrials, all the rest had to appear in court. In the afternoon, after lunch, the undertrials who had to appear in court were taken to court. Inside the jail, as part of their peaceful agitation, the eleven undertrials refused to go back into their cells. They pointed out that as undertrial prisoners they were entitled to spend some time outside their cells. At once the jail warders headed by the Chief Jailor fell upon them and began to beat them up with lathis. After this they dragged them and threw them into their cells. Some of the Naxalite prisoners suffered fractures, the majority of them were bathed in blood, and some became unconscious. Meanwhile the jail authorities called in the Armed Reserve Police, who cordoned off the prison and lined the path that led from the main entrance of the jail to the segregation wards. When those who had gone to the court returned, they were split into groups of five and made to walk from the main entrance to their wards. What followed was coldblooded. The majority of the political prisoners fell on the way. They were abused, kicked with booted legs, and hit with lathis and rifle-butts. Finally they were dragged and thrown into their cells. Few minutes later the doctor in-charge came in to report on their condition. On the basis of his report the beatings continued throughout the day and well into the night, until the doctor felt that any more beating would cause permanent injury or death.

Insanity, Suicide : The result of this beating was terrible. One of the undertrials had his hip bone dislocated and was in terrible pain for many months because the doctor-in-charge re-

fused to acknowledge the fact that he required medical treatment. After this show of violence and calculated brutality, the youngest of the undertrials, hardly 16, began to show signs of insanity. Another undertrial was driven to commit suicide. Both these cases, before they had reached such a critical stage, were referred to the doctor-in-charge who in his superior wisdom passed them off with a shrug of his elegant shoulders. Two of the undertrials who were being treated for tuberculosis were also among the ones who were beaten up. If nothing else, the doctor could have prevented them from receiving such treatment, but he chose to remain silent. We have also example of another gentleman—the I. G. of Prisons, Gopala Menon. Some of the undertrials complained to him about this brutal treatment by the warders and he, true to his class, replied : "The beating has only begun".

November 30, 1974

Andhra Pradesh

ANOTHER CONSPIRACY

A CORRESPONDENT

Sircilla-Karimnagar : The Andhra Pradesh Government has initiated one more conspiracy case, this time against the innocent peasants of Sircilla taluq of Karimnagar district. Some 14 "extremists" were seized along with 16 guns on 7-8-1974 on a hillock in Sircilla forest. They were said to have been surrounded while parading, but two escaped. On 25-8-1974 four more people were arrested on Gaddigutta (another hillock in the same forest) with "24 guns".

If we study the background of the latest conspiracy case of Nimmapalli, we can well understand the nature and hollowness of the others.

Nimmapalli is, relatively, a big village. It has a landlord, Banthala Raghava Rao, who owns 600 acres. He killed a number of innocent people branding them communists during the Telengana struggle. No one in this village has escaped from his atrocity. Everyone is fed up with the suffering. It is his routine to manhandle someone in the village everyday. Villagers are forced to do free labour for him.

A new situation arose with the beginning of activities of the Andhra Pradesh Revolutionary Communist Party in this area. Peasant-labour organisations have been set up in the villages. These started mobilising the people on immediate issues.

The Harijans of Nimmapalli were given nearly 21 acres of land some 25 years ago during the Telengana struggle. Pattas were also granted them. This was done by the landlord to win over the Harijans to his side from the communists, and in return for their free labour on his land. Following a dispute between the landlord and the Harijans over free labour, the landlord forcibly evicted them from their lands. They approached the authorities for action. But nothing happened. The Harijans then cut the Tel crop, raised by the landlord on the disputed land. But the landlord took away the crop with his hoodlums from the houses of the people.

This year in June, people cleared the land and were about to plough it but the landlord came and tried to plough it with his tractor. There was a clash. The landlord's son, Hanmanth Rao, personally drove the tractor over the people and their ploughs. Some people were injured. The peasants hit back with stones. Those who came with the landlord remained silent spectators and did not dare to interfere. The landlord was injured. Frightened by this outburst of anger of the people, he raised his hands folded, as a mark of submission and surrender to them. They stopped stone-throwing as the tractor stopped dead.

After this, the police unleashed a reign of terror in Nimmapalli, and Konaraopet in particular and the neighbouring villages. Wherever there were peasant-labour organisations the

people were beaten up mercilessly. A police case was initiated against 19 people (none were Harijans) alleging that they had waylaid and beaten the landlord in an attempt to murder him. All the 19 accused attended the court and secured bail. Four days later, two peasant-labour leaders on bail were taken away by the police from their houses on 21-7-1974 under pretext of securing some information from them. They were accompanied by five more new people. All the seven were tortured and kept in illegal custody for 18 days. Peasant-labour associations all over the State and civil liberties committees agitated against their arrests, issued pamphlets and statements to the press. College students in Karimnagar town boycotted classes and took out a procession and submitted memorandum, registering their protest and demanding the release of the arrested people. This issue was raised in the State Legislative Assembly. The Chief Minister declared that the Harijans of Nimmapalli would be given all security against the landlords and their land safeguarded. Afterwards the Government declared that its police had earlier arrested some 14 extremists parading with 16 guns on Morrigutta. Surprisingly the names of the people arrested on 21-7-74 were included in the list of the apprehended. The rest of the fourteen names announced were taken into custody by the police in Konaraopet village in the presence of many people. After this, Vengal Rao declared in the Assembly in reply to a question that the government would not tolerate the extremists acting in the name of Harijans and peasants. After his statement, four more innocent people were taken into custody in Konaraopet village in the presence of many people. The police later announced that they had been apprehended on Gaddigutta with 24 guns.

The Government established police camps in Konaraopet, Nimmpalli and Earnapally. In every village, members of the peasant organisations were harrassed. Ordinary people too were not spared. Peasant organisation has become a banned word. Goppu Ganganna, who accompanied the relative of the

arrested people to the Sircilla Magistrate's court to submit a search warrant petition, was severely beaten by the police on his return to Konaraopoet. K. Fajaiah, secretary of the Taluka Civil Liberties Committee, who led the Karimnagar students in the protest procession, is being hounded by the police and has been accused in the conspiracy case. His house in Vemulawada has been raided by the police.

November 30, 1974

THE PARVATIPURAM CASE

D. KRISHNAMURTY

On 16. 1. 1970 a First Information Report (FIR) was registered in the Parvatipuram taluk Police Station in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. The names of 148 persons were mentioned in this report among others, stating that the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) popularly known as Naxalites, decided to bring about revolution through violence and that some of the most important people like Vempatapu Satyanarayana, Chowdary Tejeswara Rao and others, at the incitement of Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Sushital Roy Chowdhury met at Boddapadu village in Srikakulam district in or about October 1968, and conspired to commit dacoities, murder landlords, attack the police and other governmental officials to overthrow the Government. The charge-sheet mentioned as many as 30 murders, 100 dacoities and about 200 other offences committed by the accused till 26. 10. 1970, i.e. the date on which it was filed.

The Government did not stop with filing the chargesheet alone. Instead of producing the arrested in a court of law, it shot down Comrades Vempatapu Satyanarayana, Adibhatla Kailasam, Pondala Balakrishna, an engineering college lecturer,

Rameshchandra Saho, Dr Devineni Mallikharjunadu, Dr Changanti Bhaskara Rao, Subba Rao Panigrahi, Panchadi Krishnamurty and his wife Panchadi Nirmala, Thamada Ganapati, Arika Somulu, Rajaram Reddy and many others. At last a chargesheet was filed on 26. 10. 1970 against 140 people among whom were Chowdary Tejeswara Rao, Kanu Sanyal, Souren Bosu and others. The prosecution has cited 1,024 witnesses on its side and thousands of pages of documents and other materials.

The Government played all sorts of tricks to delay the trial and to a great extent it succeeded. The trial began on 14. 11. 1974, 58 months after the FIR was filed, when the charges were framed against the accused in the Additional Sessions Court of Visakhapatnam. The charges against Comrade Tejeswara Rao and 74 other accused were conspiracy to overthrow the Government, collection of arms and ammunition, preaching of violence, waging war against the Government and committing of murders, dacoities etc. under various sections of the Indian Penal Code.

The examination of the prosecution witnesses began on 20. 11. 1974 and till 26. 11. 1974, three approvers have been examined. With all the past experience and delaying tactics of the Government, nobody can say how many months and years it will take to complete the examination of all the 1,024 prosecution witnesses.

A committee under the presidentship of Sri Tarimala Nagi Reddy, a veteran revolutionary, is looking after the defence arrangements in this conspiracy case as well as many other cases in Andhra Pradesh, particularly in the Agency areas of Srikakulam district, now pending from the committal stage to the High Court and Supreme Court. This Committee is arranging legal defence for all those who want and accept its defence arrangements. It has engaged Sri S. V. L. Narasimham, an experienced and veteran advocate of Guntur town, and Sri K. Ramakrishna Reddy, advocate of Anantapur town. They are defending comrades Tejeswara Rao, Kanu Sanyal, Souren Bosu,

Chowdhury Sampoolnamma, tribal leaders like Govindarao Yendudora, Nimmala Krishna Murty and 28 other accused, mostly peasants and tribal comrades. Others have engaged their own advocates. A few have boycotted the court.

The Parvatipuram case has acquired a unique position in the annals of the revolutionary movement and the judicial system in the country, as it involves top-ranking leaders of the Naxalite movement and a very large number of witnesses. It is said to be the biggest case ever of this nature in South Asia.

December 28, 1974

NAXALITE POLITICS IN PUNJAB

AN OBSERVER

Even before the event of Naxalbari took place, antagonisms were smouldering within the Punjab CP(M) unit between the militant cadres and the leadership on many crucial questions. Owing to a rickety organisational structure the unit had only a superficial influence on the people and had no real powerful mass base among the basic classes.

Immediately after Naxalbari, a process of rift and division started in the Punjab CP(M) unit, resulting in the expulsion of Maoist-oriented cadres, who later on formed a Co-ordination Committee at the State level. But soon serious difference arose between them on many important questions, the line of annihilation being the central one. From the very beginning the Bhatinda District Committee of Revolutionaries adamantly opposed the line of individual annihilation and differed on many other issues such as uneven development of revolutionary struggles, economic struggles, origin and development of people's war, leadership of working classes, formation of CP(ML) and above all on the issue of mass organisations. Despite the flood of humiliating phrases such as renegades, traitors, people's ene-

mies, revisionists, etc. etc., they stuck to their guns, in isolation, without being swayed along the powerful current of revolutionary terrorism. After a time the Punjab unit of the CP(ML) was confronted with internal bickerings, mutual disbelief and allegations which led to further split of the unit into two groups, called itself 'Punjab-Himachal Committee of CP-(ML)' and started its own monthly paper *Lok Yudh* as its political-ideological organ. Both groups had similar politics, but one attributed the recognition of the other by the central leadership to political manoeuvring and sectarianism. After the fizzling out of the first phase of terrorism, rift and division at the central level, the Punjab-Himachal Committee joined hands with the Satya Narain Singh group, while many of its members defected to the Bhatinda District Committee of Revolutionaries which had separated from the CP(ML) in February 1970 and had been working independently. Now there are three different groups of communist revolutionaries in Punjab, the original CP(ML), the SNS group and the Punjab Communist Revolutionary Committee (PCRC) which was originally the Bhatinda District Committee.

As laid down by Charu Majumdar in the *Liberation*, the line of individual annihilation was the only form of struggle to rouse the masses while all other struggles were branded sheer economism. The formation and development of militant mass movements were declared outmoded and guerilla activities by secret squads were specially emphasised. At a later stage, it was declared that annihilations of class-enemies should be carried out, only with conventional weapons in order to release the initiative of the oppressed peasantry. Thus a series of annihilation was carried out by the secret squads of revolutionaries in which not more than 90 class enemies were destroyed, the majority of them being moneylenders. In so-called encounters with the police about one hundred revolutionaries were killed. (About 20 revolutionaries sentenced to different periods of imprisonment are languishing in jails without the help of any aid committee.)

A wave of terror was let loose by the Punjab Government. Money was announced for the heads of revolutionaries and special police cells were created to hunt, torture and kill them, their family members and sympathisers. In Punjab, the annihilations carried out by the Naxalite cadres traversed a typical pattern. Once the annihilation was carried out, revolutionaries had to leave that area and could never consolidate there again. Thus they shifted from one place to another and the real purpose of "rousing the masses and releasing their initiative" could never be realised. In the heat of terrorism nobody had the time to stop and think over this state of affairs. Nasty, individual police officers were attacked by the revolutionaries. There were fierce police onslaughts on villages—Dadahoor (Sangrur district), Manguwal (Jullundur district) and Kala Sanghain(Kapurthala district). The entire population of the villages were indiscriminately beaten up, crops burnt and houses destroyed. People felt utterly helpless before such mass repression. How should the organised white terror of the State be opposed in the absence of some mass organisation ? The line of terrorism, of course, had no answer to this most burning practical question. The climax was approached with the death of the seventy-year-old Ghadarite communist, Baba Boojha Singh. After he was declared shot dead by the police in a so-called encounter, there was not one demonstration in Punjab in protest against this wanton killing. For the CPI and CP(M) such opportunities proved really god-sent. They organised meetings in which instead of exposing the police, Naxalites were attacked for leading the masses astray and leaving them in the lurch at a crucial moment.

At present, all the three groups in Punjab are emphasising in their theoretical organs the indispensability of militant mass movements. The SNS group has its own separate mass organisations such as Kirti-Kisan Sabha and NauJawan Bharat Sabha. During JP's Punjab visit in October 1974, when the CPI was busy mobilising the people for the anti-JP rally and the other parties were working to make the JP rally a grand success, the

mass organisations under the influence of the PCRC staged an impressive demonstration at Moga on October 22 with the participation of 10,000 people to suggest the politics of the Third Alternative. The SNS group openly supports the JP movement and during the JP rally at Ludhiana, one of its workers addressed the public. But the PCRC firmly rejects the politics of JP and the argument of radicalising it from within in order to harness the movement for a revolutionary cause. Though the Punjab Students Union (PSU) is a single organisation, all the three groups have their influence among the students and a tussle is going on between the three separate tendencies to capture the organisation. It is worth mentioning here that at the beginning of the terrorist phase the PSU was completely abandoned, but later on it was slowly revived by the efforts of the PCRC and after the Moga massacre emerged as a powerful organisation of the Punjab students with leftist tendencies. A few months back, a militant demonstration of peasants led by the Wahikar Union (peasant front of the PCRC) was fired at, at Jagroan, in which one man was killed. The PCRC is the only fast developing Naxalite group which is extending its influence among the different social groups and is the main target of CPI and CP(M) criticism. The latest spectacular achievement of this organisation was the powerful demonstration staged at Bhatinda on November 26. According to the local press, including CPI and CP(M), processionists numbering about 15,000 under the leadership of Wahikar Union, Bharat Nau Jawan Sabha (the same name is used by SNS group) and PSU gheraoed the district headquarters to press their demands and immediate release of some of their workers arrested earlier. According to the press, the Naxalite elements were carrying lathis and sharp-edged weapons during the clash, when the police opened fire seriously injuring many people. Later on, the police brutally lathi-charged the demonstrators, people in the nearby shops and arrested many. The news of such a militant demonstration was suppressed by all the Delhi-based big newspapers, knowing well that the JP-blessed,

so-called People's Front had no hand in it.

In their respective newspapers *Nawan Jamana* and *Lok Laher* the leaders of the CPI and CP(M) are sharply attacking the Naxalites, politically as well as ideologically. After the Bhatinda demonstration, in two consecutive editorials, the editor of *Nawan Jamana*, Jagjit Singh Anand, member of National Council of the CPI, criticised the complacency of the Government concerning the demand of the peasantry and thus leaving it at the mercy of the Naxalites.

Both these parties, while hurling abusive jargon, point towards the terrorist phase to show how the Naxalites used to flee whenever there was a police onslaught after the annihilating action. This is another example of the negative contribution of terrorism to the fast developing mass movement in Punjab. To counter the designs of the CPI and CP(M), political and ideological solidarity among the various Naxalite groups in Punjab is needed, the chances of which do not seem bright in the near future because of the uncordial relations among them. Punjab Naxalite Revolutionaries have no weekly or fortnightly political-cultural paper to answer the attacks of their adversaries and to disseminate their politics among the broad masses. Not only this, the open alliance of the SNS group with the JP-blessed "People's Front" also spreads confusion among the people concerning the line of clearcut Naxalite politics. Keeping in view the crucial juncture through which the country is passing, in the present political context of Punjab when the CPI and CP(M) are finding it very difficult to keep the masses under their influence, the united action of all the Naxalite groups has the potentiality of building a significantly broad-based, powerful mass movement in order to have a considerable impact on the political life of the province.

Comment

DISTANT THUNDER ?

The action was extraordinary. On June 3, 17 "extremists" were killed in a 12-hour pitched battle with the CRP and other police at Gharuwan Tola under the Masaurhi police station in the interior of Patna district. According to police sources, the Naxalites had a fortified hide-out with tunnels and pillboxes where no less than 1,000 items of ammunition were stored. All the killed were "outsiders' ; most of them were "non-Harijans". The killed included two Jadavs, a former jawan of the Bihar Military Police, a Naxalite leader from West Bengal, a Muslim ex-serviceman of the Army and two Harijans.

In the pitched battle jawans armed with even light machine-guns were posted at all the strategic points. "But the extremists did not relent". No policeman was killed, though some were wounded. It was a strange encounter. The CPI General Secretary calls it cold-blooded murder.

Companies of the CRP and BMP are camping in the region. There is strange silence all around and people are terror-stricken. The "extremists", who have suffered a major setback, are believed to be regrouping in some other villages.

A report in *The Statesman* of May 25 said that the monsoon would set the scene for a Naxalite offensive in Bhojpur district. In villages dominated by Naxalites women predominate ; most of the men seem to have left their homes, partly because of police raids and partly to prepare for an "offensive". The Naxalites have made attempts to infiltrate the army, the police and the administration. According to *The Statesman* report, the "area commanders" of the Naxalites organise indoctrination and what is called the red army and prepare a list of enemies—big landlords, womanisers and police, but they do not participate in the punishment that is decided upon by the village leaders.

The roots of the tension lie in the savage exploitation by landlords of the Harijans and other landless labourers. The high-caste kulaks are riding high. A Harijan boy was burnt alive in a haystack because he was rude to some belonging to the upper caste. Some Harijans were assaulted with spears and other weapons because they did not get up when some upper-caste people were passing by. As about 80% of the people are daily-wage labourers, almost all belonging to the lowest castes, the caste war has been turned into class war by the Naxalites. There are said to be 1,000 hard-core Naxalites in the district ; the number of their sympathisers runs into thousands. Even some policemen admire their dedication and courage.

Mr J. P. Narayan said in Patna earlier in May, that what was most shocking was the open collusion between the administration and the landowners. It appeared, he said, as though under the pretext of fighting Naxalites, the police force, both armed and civil, had been placed at the disposal of the "rural power structure" to terrorise the low-caste agricultural labour and ruthlessly suppress even the most peacefully articulated demand for increase of the dismally low farm wages.

The other day, AIR, Delhi, in its mid-day Hindi transmission announced that the Bihar Chief Minister, Dr Jagannath Misra, had ordered fire-arms for all able-bodied men in Patna and Bhojpur districts to meet the menace of the "extremists".

June 14, 1975

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

LAWRENCE LIFSCHULTZ

On more than one occasion since India's political emergency began last June, the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, has commented how in her view many people, particularly in

the West "seem to have different standards for Indian than for other Countries". In late September, however, when Franco's fascist Government executed two Basque nationalists and three Marxist-Leninist rebels, India joined in that common standard of international indignation and outrage over the killings. Demonstration swept Europe and public fury compelled Governments to snap diplomatic relations with Madrid. Franco stood condemned and isolated.

But on December 1, hardly two months after "El Caudillo's" last act of vengeance ended with five riddled bodies dead in a Spanish field, two middle-aged peasants named Bhoomaiah and Kista Gowd were hanged in India. The world said not a word. In the international press there wasn't even a negative editorial comment.

The hanging of Bhoomaiah and Gowd, members of the non-banned Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), popularly known as the Naxalites, was the first execution of political prisoners in India since N. V. Godse, the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi, and Apte, his accomplice, walked the gallows more than a quarter of a century ago. Both the "Naxalites" were sentenced to death for killing of their local landlord, Lachchu Patel of Adilabad district in Andhra Pradesh. Patel, according to evidence presented in the case, was rather typical of many among India's rural landowning gentry who through extortion, usury, and force maintain their dominance over sharecroppers, or bonded labourers. One day in April 1970, Gowd (45), who was a farmer, and Bhoomaiah, the village tailor, participated in a daylight march of nearly three hundred villagers upon the landlord's house. The confrontation ended in Patel's death and 28 peasants were hauled up on murder charges.

The incident occurred during a period when in a large tribal tract of Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, the Naxalite guerilla movement reached a peak in 1970 and "red" power in embryonic form actually emerged in many villages. Government forces at the time were faced with frequent guerilla squad

actions and in much of Srikakulam actual administrative control was lost.

In the case, charges were eventually dropped against all except Bhoomaiah and Gowd, who were convicted of murder and sentenced to death on January 5, 1972. Since then they lived under the executioner's shadow, dying, according to one Indian commentator, "in instalments". In the last four years there were several attempts to gain Presidential clemency for the two prisoners. Their execution had been set for November 26, 1974, but the Chief Minister of Andhra was persuaded to issue a temporary restraining order. The stay came only after the jailor had already come to take their neck measurements. Another date was set for May 11 of last spring. Although a closely guarded secret, the timing leaked out and three young lawyers in Andhra Pradesh, having found a legal loophole in the fact that the rejection of their clients' mercy petition by the President had not been communicated to the condemned, were able to persuade an Andhra High Court Judge to hold open court in his front yard and to issue a restraining order barely moments before the execution could be carried out. In the end State's High Court rejected their writ petition and the case was then brought before India's Supreme Court.

Bhoomaiah and Gowd's lawyers argued that a killing which occurred out of deep political motives which themselves were the expression for a society free from exploitative social practices had to be distinguished from run-of-the-mill crimes. Such a murder committed out of feeling of intense frustration and motivated by a desire to establish social and economic justice through violence, the lawyers said, must be considered a political offence inspired by failures to redeem the pledges underlying the Indian Constitution. As such the political criteria of the offence had to be considered independently and individuals could not be condemned as ordinary criminals.

On October 3, a Supreme Court Bench, including Justice Krishna Iyer who played a prominent role in the Prime Minister's legal tribulations last summer, handed down a final judg-

ment on the case of the two Andhra peasants. While the Supreme Court judges clearly acknowledged the class of political offences as one distinct from plain murder, they pointed out that "the penal code which, by oath of office enforce, makes no such classification...[and] we cannot rewrite the law, whatever our own views on urgent reforms". No matter how sympathetic the Court might be, it was an area reserved by the Constitution for a Presidential judgment.

The judges went on to say that the "rejection of one clemency petition does not exhaust the power of the President or the Governor. The political nature of the offence and the undoubted decline in capital punishment in most countries of the world should be urged before the President. Over the centuries society has come away from the crueller forms of legal death, and almost a revolutionary change in penology has taken place in England since 1801 when a boy of 13 could be hung for stealing a spoon". The judges spoke of "not raw ferocity but warm humanity in the heart of law".

Within a few days of the Supreme Court declaring the question beyond its jurisdiction, a new petition campaign began. One plea signed by 136 jurists, including three former Chief Justices of High Courts and over 130 Supreme Court lawyers, was submitted to the President. Earlier, 80 members of Parliament including many members of the Congress had called for a reprieve. And the Communist Party of India began an earnest last-minute attempt to dissuade the authorities.

But all these efforts received no publicity whatsoever. Some in Delhi argue that censorship actually proved a decisive element in the deadly outcome of death for the two accused. A few foreign correspondents and diplomats who had maintained an interest in the case were unaware of any imminent execution until the last moment or after it had already happened. Due to events in Bangladesh several foreign correspondents were away from New Delhi and the interested foreign press was unable to play the informative role India's own had performed prior to the Emergency or as the Press had done in Europe

during the case of the "Spanish Five". The time of the hanging was kept a closely guarded secret. And when the moment of execution actually came after so many years of delay and reprieve, it did so with such suddenness that it caught most of those concerned by total surprise.

The case had dragged on three years and seven months and most observers expected it to go on for quite a while longer. No political prisoner had yet been executed in India since Gandhi's assassin, and there was an aura of disbelief that the authorities would actually go through with it in the case of the two Naxalites.

Last May, nearly all India's major dailies gave prominent coverage to the story, with papers like the *Hindustan Times* running lead editorials entitled "The Forgotten Ones". But the only item to appear this last and fatal time was a three-sentence, one inch blurb, dated November 30, which actually showed up in the papers the morning of the hanging, December 1. New Delhi readers awoke to the last sentence of the official news report—"Both the prisoners are scheduled to be hanged tomorrow morning"—hours after both men were already dead.

What has baffled and disturbed many closely concerned with the trial is why Bhoomaiah and Gowd were hanged when similar cases brought before India's President have received clemency. Only two years ago, the celebrated case of Nagabhusan Patnaik, a 40-year-old lawyer and a top functionary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) was granted a commutation of the death sentence following a Cabinet decision. Patnaik had participated in guerilla squad action in which a landlord died, and although he personally refused at his trial to defend himself, be defended, or plead for clemency, others were successful in winning a pardon on his behalf.

More recently, India's President granted a mid-term reprieve to Shamin Rehmani who had been sentenced to life imprisonment for a murder far less political in nature. She had killed her lover. Her upper class origins and political connections at the highest level were apparently decisive factors.

Bhoomaiah and Gowd had none of the glamour of bright young college-educated children of the upper class turned into revolutionaries. They were peasants, one a farmer and the other a part-time tailor, who apparently did not know the right people where it counted. Nor, as some of the more cynical in the Indian capital point out, did they have the power to move Parliament to amend the law in their favour.

A figure involved in the negotiations for their clemency claims that the Home Ministry apparently rejected their plea for mercy saying they could not be considered under the category of political prisoners, since they were both uneducated and illiterate. Unlike Nagabhusan Patnaik, they were not intellectuals, and therefore, in the logic of certain officials, could not be considered to have acted from political motives.

Nevertheless, the backgrounds of both indicate the opposite. They had been politically active participants in the communist-led Telengana peasants' uprising in the late 1940s. And Kista Gowd had served a two-year prison sentence in connection with that movement.

During the appeal, India's Civil Rights Committee compared the case to that of Dostoevsky, whose death sentence was commuted in the last minutes by the Czar. The Committee called upon the Prime Minister and the President thus : "Let it not be said that Czar Nicholas I was more compassionate and merciful than the Sovereign Democratic Republic of India'. But even that didn't work.

January 10, 1976

Andhra Pradesh

DEATH OF A 'DACOIT'

K. V. R.

The district of Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh is remote and Dharmavaram taluk is more so. But it hit the headlines last year with the news of the murder of P. Sriramulu, the leader of the poor peasantry in and around Nasankot and a poet. He was described by the bourgeois and revisionist press as a dacoit chief posing as a Naxalite ; and Nasankot and a dozen villages and hamlets around it came under police terror. Before Sriramulu was shot dead, the villages had seen a wave of land struggle, reminiscent of the 1950-1952 Communist-led seizure of thousands of acres of *benami* land. Sriramulu was obliged to fight the Government and landlords as well as the revisionists and neo-revisionists simultaneously.

The 1950-52, struggle yielded short-lived gains for the land-hungry peasantry, for the Party let them down by striking a deal with the feudal elements over the panchayat and the Assembly elections. One such betrayal took place in Nasankot itself where C. Mutyalappa, now in the CPI(M), became sarpanch by dubious means. Rich peasants were his prop and mainstay. They succeeded in evicting several poor peasants from 40 to 50 acres of dry land which the latter had won in struggle and turned it into grazing land for their cattle. The funds of the local credit society were misappropriated in the name of helpless Harijan dependents. It was here that Sriramulu rallied the poor around him, organised them into committees for 'land struggle' at the village level and led them to occupy one thousand acres of *benami* land in about ten villages and hamlets around Nasankot.

Himself a product of the 1950-52 struggle, Sriramulu was steeled in many a fight. He dissociated himself from his own

class of rich peasantry and identified himself with the landless poor and small peasantry. He was sentenced to life imprisonment together with 30 others on charges of murdering a local tyrant in 1958. At the time he was barely twenty. Hardly out of the high school, he was largely self-educated. He took to poetry in his prison life. Though not of a high order, it was the outpouring of a genuine emotion. Though feeling despondent he struck an optimistic note expressing a desire to live and learn and fight for a better order. That was how it turned out to be. On his release from jail after three years Sriramulu kept aloof from party politics until the agitation in Naxalbari and then in Srikakulam. His own district produced courageous revolutionaries, Comrades Rauf and Bondayya, and several martyrs. Coming in contact with like-minded writers, he became President of Chaitanya Sahiti and then a member of the Viplava Rachayitah Sangham. Writing off and on, he gave expression in his poems to the yearnings and aspirations of masses on the move. They are rough products of a real fighter, unsophisticated and unadorned. It is not, however, as a poet that Sriramulu is known, but as a fighter.

Innumerable were the slanders spread by the rich. He was called the leader of a rowdy gang who lifted sheep and oil engines, smashed agricultural implements, dug up crops and carried out dacoities. In an area which was notorious for all these things, it is no wonder if a 'betrayer' like Mutyalappa was beaten up. He had filed a case against the poor in his capacity as sarpanch for occupying and cultivating land after removing the trees therefrom, on the plea that it 'belonged' to a few rich peasants. In fact, they had seized it from the poor after 1952. More remarkable was the way in which a landlord was tried in a people's court and let off, after he promised to turn over a new leaf. This was certainly a new and higher form of agrarian struggle. Agrarian, political and literary struggles thus merged in this illustrious fighter.

Sriramulu was implicated in a dozen cases. An arrest warrant under MISA was actually awaiting the District Collec-

tor's signature for execution. High police officers of Andhra and Karnataka had met to devise measures to meet the situation—Karnataka State is just a few miles away from Nasankot. Attempts on Sriramulu's life were not new. He was speared in the back in 1972. Professional murderers from Cuddapah had been brought by his feudal enemies to finish him off in 1974. His people guarded him all through. But May 29, 1975, saw him dead.

One of his adherents, a hunter by birth and profession, is said to have been won over by local landlords and supplied with a .303 rifle and a muzzle-loader. While Sriramulu was travelling in a bus to attend a marriage at Vallur in Karnataka State, the hunter brought the bus to a halt near Ketaganicharla. Sriramulu was not alone. But he was unarmed. The murderer fired many rounds, killing Sriramulu's brother and two of his followers, before Sriramulu himself came out of the bus in order to avert further deaths on his account. He was shot in the heel, thigh and then in the chest when he bared it to his murderer. A hunter's knife cut his throat when he fell and a boulder was thrown on his head.

Retribution will come. When it comes, there will be no stopping it. As Sriramulu himself put in a poem in 1961, the struggle is terrible and unending.

February 28, 1976

Letter

RUAM JUNGLE CASE

We would like to draw public attention to the plight of 34 Naxalites facing trial in the Ruam Jungle conspiracy case in the court of the Additional Sessions Judge of Jamshedpur, Mr. S. P. Singh. The main charges against these Naxalites

are : waging war against the legally constituted government under section 121A and 122 of the Indian Penal Code, attempt to commit dacoity and murder under sections 397 and 149 of the IPC and sundry other charges like recovery of arms, ammunition and objectionable leaflets.

After the bomb-throwing incident in the Inspector's bungalow at Ghatsila on May 26, 1970, altogether 52 persons were arrested in the Ruam jungle and adjoining areas between May 27 and 31, 1970. Later on, Mary Tyler, a British national arrested in the swoop, was released under international pressure. No commitment could be made against Shaibal Roy, as he was suffering from tuberculosis. From the rest, a batch of 16 prisoners were taken away by the Bengal Police for trial in a bank robbery case. The trial of these sixteen as also of Mr Roy is still pending. The others were committed to sessions in the Jamshedpur court in mid-1974.

During the trial period the Naxalites were kept in the notorious Hazaribagh jail under inhuman conditions. They were prevented from meeting even their dying parents. All this time they were made to live in a condition of constant threat of death and violence which worsened after the killing of 16 undertrial Naxalites in Hazaribagh jail in 1971 allegedly while trying to escape.

Normal legal facilities available to undertrial prisoners were denied to these Naxalites. They were not allowed to meet either their lawyers or their relatives during the trial period. This total disregard for basic human rights of undertrial prisoners is matched by the liberal spending by the government to defend its case. Services of five lawyers were requisitioned to assist the public prosecutor, Mr A. V. Singh. Incidentally, Mr A. V. Singh is the younger brother of the one-time DIG of Ghatsila, Mr Lalit Vijoy Singh who is now the Chief Security Officer of Bokaro Steel Ltd. Altogether about Rs 14 lakhs has been spent from the public exchequer for this case of which Rs 6 lakhs has gone by way of payment to these lawyers. But even then the police took full four months to

frame charges. During the trial period they adopted delaying tactics which drew serious strictures from the judge.

The new Janata Government has already set a good precedent by withdrawing the Baroda Dynamite case which was by and large of similar nature. The chief accused is, in fact, holding an important ministerial post in the Central Cabinet. There cannot be any difficulty on the part of the present Government to take similar steps in the case of the Ruam Jungle conspiracy case. We urge the Government to expedite the matter.

HIRANMOY DHAR, P. P. GHOSH, N. SENGUPTA,
T. V. RAO, ARUN SINHA, B. K. BASU.
A. N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna.

April 30, 1977

JUDGMENT ON RUAM JUNGLE CASE

ARUN SINHA

The Additional District and Sessions Judge of Jamshedpur, Mr S. P. Singh, has exonerated 30 of the accused. Four of them—Bishwanath Ghosh, Bimal Biswas, Tapan Chakravorty and Shankar—have been sentenced to seven years rigorous imprisonment under the Arms Act. But the sentence hardly affects them for they have already spent seven years as undertrials ; the period of jail custody, according to the new criminal procedure code, is to be set off against the sentence. That means, all the 34 will be released.

The judge has rejected the very pivot of the conspiracy case, which was related to bomb-throwing at the office-cum-residence of the police inspector of Ghatsila near Jamshedpur. The prosecution turned this bomb-throwing into "dacoity with deadly weapons". Let us see what the judge has to say on this : "No such occurrence of dacoity or attempt at dacoity

took place...For seven to ten minutes 15 bombs were allegedly exploded one after another. There was also gun-firing and an alarm was raised by the sentry on duty as well as by six other constables present there. The dacoits were also crying out. But the police inspector woke up and came out after the alleged dacoits had gone away in a bus...Even though there were so many constables and rifles not a single shot was fired on the alleged dacoits and despite there being so many explosions of bombs not a single individual was injured nor any splinter of the exploded bombs was produced in the court... The prosecution had failed to prove that any of the accused was identified in the alleged occurrence. The accused have been acquitted."

Dacoity with deadly weapons was only one of the seven charges made against the accused. The case of conspiracy to wage war against the Government of India under Sections 121 and 121A of IPC was also rejected by the court. The judgment said, "...The requirements of Section 195 of Criminal Procedure Code have not been fulfilled by the prosecution. The section requires that complaint in the case should be filed by an officer empowered by the Government to do so. Here in this case the SP of Singhbhum was empowered by the State Government to make the complaint. But no complaint was made by the SP, Singhbhum..,Instead the DSP submitted a charge-sheet. Therefore, the cognisance taken by the SDO was illegal and the trial has been without jurisdiction."

The court refused permission to the prosecution to make a fresh complaint saying that the "prosecution has been unduly slow in bringing the accused to trial and they have already remained in jail for long seven years as undertrial prisoners". This was a serious stricture on the prosecution. Nothing could be more correct in the court's observation in so far as the way the trial was conducted by the prosecution. In the first place, it took full four months to frame the charges against the accused. The trial began in the middle of 1974, more than four years after they were arrested. Even during

the trial, the prosecution (in effect, the police) adopted delaying tactics which drew serious strictures from the court ; the strictures are incorporated in the record book of the court.

June 4, 1977

Letter

ON WHICH SIDE ?

As a natural consequence of the widely appreciated defeat of the notorious Congress Party the question of the release of political prisoners including those who stood by the heroic peasants of Naxalbari, Srikakulam etc., has come to the fore-front. The question of release of political prisoners is closely related with the question of the liberation of the oppressed peasants of India. It needs immense courage and confidence to withstand and challenge the abominable landlord rule in the rural areas, abetted by the feudal culture of *Karma* and *Dharma* and caste hierarchy and monopoly over land. As gamekeepers turned poachers, the preachers of the rule of law and democracy are themselves the breakers of law and destroyers of people's democracy. If a fair enquiry is held, the rulers cannot escape the guilt of having perpetrated heinous crimes against innocent peasants and workers and patriots.

Most districts of Andhra Pradesh are credited with one or more cases of conspiracy to overthrow Mrs Gandhi's Govern-ment, which are in no way different from the Baroda Dynamite Case. It is the duty of patriots to demand of the Janata Government to decide its attitude towards the oppressed sections of the peasants struggling for their liberty for land and towards those parties and patriots who stood by them.

NAGABHUSAN PATNAIK,
Political Prisoner, Central Prison
Visakhapatnam

May 14, 1977

KERALA'S NAZI CAMP

MUKUNDAN C. MENON

Kakkayam is a village in the Vayanad forest area at the northern end of Kerala. It easily gets the first place in respect of both natural beauty and backwardness. The inhabitants are mostly displaced persons from Travancore at the southern end of the State, and plantation workers. The Kuttiadi dam and the powerhouse attached to it are situated here. For its maintenance there are the Electricity Board office, a hospital and a police outpost. These are the only government offices in the Kakkayam area. There are a couple of Christian chapels and a Siva temple for the inhabitants.

The annual festival in the temple is the most important yearly event of the populace. In February 1976, the festival was held as usual and it lasted till the early hours of the next day. That day the entire population were sleeping when they were awakened by the sounds of police vehicles entering the village. For the people at Kakkayam an ordeal of further sleepless days and nights started.

Two days prior to the temple festival, the police claim, a group of "Naxalites" had attacked a police station at Kayanna, which is in the foothold of Kakkayam, and an "investigation camp" was established at Kakkayam. The then Crime Branch DIG, Jayaram Padikkal, the Calicut DSP, Laxmana, the Deputy SP, Murali Krishnadas, etc. stayed several days at the Inspection Bungalow of the Electricity Board. The lower-grade policemen stayed in the recreation club near the play-ground down the Inspection Bungalow. The recreation club was the main torture cell, commonly called "death chambers". The peaceful atmosphere of the area was shattered as cries, shouts and torture sounds started coming out of the recreation club. The glasses on the windows were covered with paper.

Later, these torture cells were removed to a three-line building covered with asbestos in a nearby place. These were used by the Electricity Board as store sheds and were beyond the observation of the local people.

It is said that not less than 50 vehicles used to come to the camp daily with an average of 20-25 captives. The total victims brought there might have been anything between 750 and 1,000 according to the local people. People belonging to all sections—college professors, lecturers, medical and engineering students, stone workers, plantation workers—were brought to the camp. The only unfortunate woman brought here was Miss C. R. Sulochana, the stage actress, who has now filed a case against the DSP, Laxmana, for violating her inside the camp.

The functioning of this camp changed the social life of the small village. After evening, women and children stayed back at their homes, not venturing to come out. Male members avoided talking with each other when they met in public. There was a canteen—the lone eating place in the area—down the Inspection Bungalow—run by an individual. He was served with an order that meals should be kept ready all through 24 hours for the policemen. The local plantation workers and others stopped taking tea there.

The tortures mainly took place at night. The police force used to take a lot of liquor. Eyewitnesses say that there were heaps of foreign liquor cartons and bottles around the camp. Tea and eatables were supplied to the policemen from the canteen throughout the night.

The captives were initially dumped in a room nicknamed "store room" by the policemen. Then one after another they were called out by their names. The inmates were able to catch the names of the others that way. It was not at all certain whether those taken out would come back to the store room. Those called were taken to the police officers. After formal interrogation, the officers decided the "brand" of the captive. The officers then ordered the now famous "roller

treatment". A constable gave instructions to the line building opposite : 'Six Maft', 'Eight Maft'. After undergoing hour-long roller treatment and other brutal methods of torture, the worn-out prisoner was put in a separate room. There he was made to sit near the wall, turning his face only to one side. He was forbidden to lie down or change the position of his face.

According to the local people, at least five persons were tortured to death here. Sometimes policemen used to discuss among themselves in low tones ; some used to take out of the camp heavy bags during odd hours : on some other occasion, at midnight mostly, some vehicles rushed out without the usual driver at the wheel—these factors, deep-rooted in the minds of the local people, helped them reach their conclusions. They say : "If any vehicle went out of the camp at an untimely hour, it meant either death or an urgent case to be admitted in the medical college."

And it is here that Rajan, the engineering college student, whose disappearance was termed by the High Court as murder by the police, was last seen. The Crime Branch DIG, Jayaram Padikkal, the DSP, Laxmana, and many other officers are in custody now. Interestingly, the case was instituted by the same coalition government of the CPI-Congress which ruled Kerala during the emergency after getting two extensions from the Indian President, and whose Ministers made statements in the Assembly supporting the emergency as "peace by force".

June 25—July 2, 1977

A VIEW FROM KERALA

BABURAJ

The split within the Communist movement in 1964 did not satisfy those inside the State who wanted a more deep and meaningful shift of the movement, the adoption of a revolutionary line. So when the Naxalbari uprising in 1967 heralded a new era in Indian politics many cadres came out of the CPM and formed a Co-ordination Committee. Following the formation of the CPI(ML) in 1969, Comrade Charu Majumdar undertook two extensive tours of Kerala and the State Committee of the party was organized. Under the leadership of this Committee the poor and landless peasants were organized and many revolutionary struggles followed. But by 1971, with the ruthless suppression of the movement by the Congress-CPI coalition Government, most of the cadres were arrested. Comrade Kisan Thomman and Velayudhan became martyrs. Comrade Verghese was arrested and brutally murdered. The movement suffered a serious setback.

By the beginning of 1972, efforts were renewed to reorganize the Party. Serious differences of opinion and disruptive tendencies at the all-India level hampered the effort initially. With the martyrdom of Charu Majumdar, more problems cropped up. But these were solved through ideological struggle. The State Committee fought against the wrong tendencies that emerged at the all-India level. The parallel CC, CPI(ML) formed by Satyanarain Singh was exposed as a revisionist offshoot which wanted to take revolutionaries away from the path of armed struggle. The COC, CPI(ML) formed by Suniti Kumar Ghosh, it was felt, strayed far away from the revolutionary line of Charu Majumdar and started harping on building up mass organizations, mass struggles etc. In effect, they also deviated from the path of armed struggle. The CC

organized by M. Mukherjee took a very wrong stand in the ideological struggle then going on inside the CPC. Instead of understanding the two-line struggle inside the CPC as an inner-party struggle of a fraternal party, they justified the stand of Lin Piao. Further, M. Mukherjee wanted Charu Majumdar to be worshipped as a veritable god for following a revolutionary line. Another erroneous view that emerged was the open call issued by six leaders from jail to fight against Charu Majumdar's revolutionary line as the CPC leaders had expressed certain views against it. The Kerala comrades fought against these three deviations and continued organizing the party. Using all available opportunities they made ideological propaganda. A number of ideological works were published in Malayalam. The Malayalam monthly *Comrade* and the English monthly *Mass Line* helped in the ideological struggle.

In the beginning of 1975, the State Committee was reorganized. Publication of *Inquilab*, the party underground organ, was also started. By this time the party had taken deep roots in most of the districts, and district committees were formed. As most of the active cadres had already gone underground, the party organization was not in any way affected when the Indira Government declared the emergency and imposed a fascist dictatorship. The State Committee analysed the situation and came to the following conclusions : The imposition of the emergency was a manifestation of the developing contradictions among the ruling classes in India. To think, in a simplistic way, that it was the handiwork of a small group of politicians to perpetuate their hegemony was wrong. The development of armed struggle under the leadership of the CPI(ML) forced the first rift in the Congress in 1969. By this time the contention between Soviet social-imperialism and U.S. imperialism to control and exploit the Indian subcontinent had also sharpened. A section of the Indian ruling class under the sway of Soviet social-imperialism maintained that the developing crisis can be met only by ruthlessly suppressing

the revolutionary forces while mouthing socialist slogans. Indira Gandhi was the leader of this section. They came out victorious in the 1969 crisis and enhanced their domination. In 1971, the Pakistan crisis and the subsequent events further strengthened them. All these years, as a part of their global strategy of encircling People's China, U. S. imperialism permitted Soviet domination over India while colluding to exploit the country. But after the near-normalisation of U.S.-China relations following Nixon's visit to China, U. S. imperialism again wanted to contend for the domination of India. By 1974, when the Indian people's mass struggle against the worsening economic conditions and mass poverty reached new heights and in Bihar the revolutionary forces launched armed struggle, the sections of the ruling classes who were opposed to the Indira clique and were on the side of U.S. imperialism took the initiative. They conveniently utilized the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan. This led to the declaration of the emergency, throwing away the mask of bourgeois democracy in June 1975. Soviet social-imperialism gave active support to this move.

The earlier decision of the State Committee to start armed actions wherever the party had a base was hastened by the new development. Following this decision the party launched attacks against feudal elements in the countryside and the State apparatus. Police stations were attacked. Rifles were seized. During the emergency months when all the opposition parties including the CPI(M) made a hasty retreat into their shells, only the revolutionaries courageously fought against the fascist dictatorship.

To counteract this revolutionary upsurge the Congress-CPI coalition let loose white terror all over the State. The State crime branch police were given a free hand to suppress the movement, "inflicting the largest possible casualties on the enemy". The State CPI Chief Minister, Achutha Menon, and the Congress Home Minister, Karunakaran, thundered in the State Assembly during March 1976 that the Naxalites would be

put down using all the forces under their command. Not satisfied, they asked for the Centre's help. Torture camps were established at more than a dozen places. At a rough estimate nearly 7000-8000 suspects were arrested and tortured. The police and the Youth Congress goondas ransacked and set fire to the houses of many party sympathisers. Parents and near relatives of absconding revolutionaries were arrested.

Rajan and many other students of the Calicut Regional Engineering College were active sympathisers of the party. They arranged shelters and organized funds for the party cadres. Following the attack on the Kayanna Police Station, Rajan and hundreds of others were rounded up in Calicut district. They were tortured at the Kakkayam camp. Political as well as police bosses visited and supervised the torture of political workers and sympathizers. In the torture camp, Comrade Rajan died in March 1976. His body was destroyed secretly by the police officers. Varkala Vijayan was another active cadre of the party. He went underground when the emergency was declared. He was arrested on March 5, 1976, in Trivandrum and taken to the crime branch headquarters at Sasthamangalam, Trivandrum. There were nearly 150 party cadres and sympathizers in that torture camp during those days. Vijayan was tortured to death on March 8, and his body was buried deep somewhere in the compound. Considering the methods of beating and torture adopted by the crime branch thugs it is surprising that many more did not die. Thousands were kept in the camps in a half-dead state, and given only occasional frugal meals. In the specially equipped torture rooms at Trivandrum, 5 party cadres were kept for seven months with their hands and legs tied with heavy chains. They were subjected to continuous interrogation all through this period. Comrade Sulochana was working for the party in the Wynaad area. She was arrested and subjected to torture and indecencies.

Comrade Balakrishnan was an employee of the survey department at Malapuram. He was arrested on March 6, 1976 along with Prabhakaran Master, a teacher of the Government

High School at Mankada, near Malapuram. They were taken to the Malapuram crime branch office and tortured during the night. Next day they were being taken to the Calicut torture camp at Kakkayam by the Deputy SP Balasubramaniam and few other policemen in a jeep. There was half a can of petrol where Comrade Balakrishnan was made to sit. Balakrishnan overturned the can of petrol, snatched a match box from a policeman and lighted the petrol. The jeep started burning. Some jumped out. The Deputy SP was prevented from jumping off by Comrade Balakrishnan who held him tight and shouted slogans till he died. The Deputy SP succumbed after two days. In Trichur and Alleppy districts many encounters took place when police raided villages. This was clear indication of the qualitative development of the struggle.

While the Youth Congress goondas and the CPI workers were actually co-operating with the police in raiding villages and arresting suspected CPI(ML) sympathizers, what were the opposition parties doing ? The Kerala Congress joined the Ministry to help the suppression of the Naxalites. The Congress(O) decided to merge with the Indira Congress "to meet the threat of the extremists". The 'powerful' CPM and its leader EMS extended their party's full co-operation in suppressing the revolutionaries and EMS volunteered to put down the 'Naxalite menace' if his party was given the democratic right to work freely. In the cyclostyled 'Party Letter' published by the CPM they asked their workers not to give shelter or any other help to revolutionaries. They started a campaign that Naxalites were police agents. It is a strange phenomenon that EMS and his party men are now crying themselves hoarse over the torture camps and killing of revolutionaries !

With the press censorship gone and the Rajan case hitting the headlines in all newspapers (except the CPI daily) the political climate in the State has changed and sympathizers are given warm welcome all over the State. With a new determination and firmly basing themselves on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought the revolutionaries are organizing themselves

for a protracted struggle. The revolutionaries do not expect any dramatic change in the country only because the Janata Party has come to power.

With U.S. imperialism getting an edge over Soviet social-imperialism in the domination of India, the hold of foreign investment over the Indian economy will further increase. As long as the four mountains—U.S. imperialism, Soviet social-imperialism, feudalism and comprador-bureaucratic capitalism —suppress the Indian people they cannot achieve a better life.

September 17, 1977

Madhya Pradesh

RAJHARA MASSACRE

A CORRESPONDENT

More than 70-80 people were killed in the police firing at Rajhara Mines (under the Bhilai Steel Project). More than a hundred were injured. And why ? The impression given by the bourgeois press and AIR is that what happened was a sequel to an armed Naxalite onslaught. The facts are otherwise.

The local workers are organized—at least were organized until recently—by the CPI-led SKMS. The CPI bosses have been playing a nefarious role all along. The 'departmentalized' workers of the Bhilai Steel Plant have been getting Rs. 308 as 'Production Performance Bonus', while the contractors' labourers, who have to do exactly the same job as the former, get nothing or much less. These workers demanded equal pay and went on strike. The pro-Moscow bosses stepped in and urged them to accept a meagre Rs. 70 offered to them and end the strike. The workers refused.

It was at this stage that Sankar Guha Neogy, who had just been freed from detention under MISA, joined the workers.

Under his leadership the labourers staged gheraos and dharnas for over three months. Large number of workers left the AITUC-led SKMS and formed a new organization, the *Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh* (CMSS).

The struggle continued to gain momentum. Yet the BSP management and the contractors refused to concede the labourers' demands. They knew that once the labourers succeeded in achieving their demands under a dedicated leader, the very existence of AITUC in Rajhara would be at stake. And that was a contingency which neither the BSP management nor the contractors could welcome.

The *Bhilai Samachar*, a Hindi weekly, wrote on 12. 6. 1977 : "The so-called 'Communist' leaders of the AITUC and some bosses of the Congress-led INTUC have gone on exploiting the workers at full steam, as a result of which the number of their houses and cars and motor cycles has gone on multiplying. These leaders started plotting against the existence of the present CMSS."

The *Tandula Samachar*, a Hindi fortnightly, of 6. 6. 1977 gives a glimpse of the actual situation : "The hypocritical propaganda machine of the government is now making the murder of over a hundred workers appear unavoidable. Under the pretext of suppressing a Naxalite movement, they are trying to bury actual facts, in the same way they have buried the corpses—still warm—under cover of the curfew or have bayoneted injured workers to death." The paper continues, "Immediately after an agreement had been reached between the contractors and the Neogy-led CMSS, the police ransacked the CMSS office. This was a nefarious plot of the contractors. There have been reports of clashes between the CPI and the CMSS earlier too, but never has the necessity to arrest Neogy been felt."

The incident of burning an AITUC flag on 31. 5. 1977 is definitely indicative of a plot. Neogy had clearly condemned the act and called for non-violent struggle. Further on many occasions he had called at the police station, when—if so desi-

red—he could easily have been arrested. Why instead of that, did the police have to arrest him stealthily while he was asleep ? It is difficult to believe that such provocative acts had no ulterior motive.

When the enraged workers demanded the release of their leader, the police started firing on the unarmed men. It was a situation that defeats all description. Men were shot dead even though they had their hands up. Bullets were aimed at injured men running for their lives until they fell down, motionless. A dying worker lucky enough to be admitted to the BSP hospital, had each arm pierced by two bullets ; there was one on the chest too. A kind-hearted doctor asked him about his last wish. The gasping man replied : 'A plate of rice. My whole family have been living on *chana* and water for two weeks on end." (The workers had been refusing pay until their demands were met.) In no time came a clean plate full of petal-white rice, only to find him incapable of eating it : he was dead.

Immediately after the massacre, the bodies were removed by the police. Yet the roadsides, the workers' bustees, the drains, the groves in the jungle were all strewn with corpses even after 4 or 5 days. Eyewitnesses report 70-80 bodies. The *Tandula Samachar* puts the total at more than one hundred. The bourgeois press however is content with reporting only 9 to 13 deaths.

Section 144 had been promulgated upto 25. 6. 1977. All meetings, posters, leaflets, slogans were 'strictly prohibited.'

As expected, hypocrites are fast making hay while the sun shines. One Mr Vidya Charan Shukla is reported to have said : "This is the first gift from the Janata Government." The irony is that the chief architect of the massacre, Mr G. Tiwari, the SP, is Mr Shukla's cousin. Thieves are all cousins—says a Bengali proverb.

Who will, according to the *Deshabandhu* of 6. 6. 1977, enquire into what happened to the peasant-leader Nathuram Bhandari, the worker-leader Bansi Lal and many others who are reported to be simply 'missing' ?

Even after so much sacrifice, the workers are undaunted. They remain firm in their stand : Their demands have to be met, Sankar Guha Neogy has to be freed. They have been reportedly refusing pay for two weeks now, which means unbearable miseries for them.

July 16, 1977

Letter

RAJHARA : A POSTSCRIPT

Sankar Guha Neogy, leader of the CMSS, was freed a few days ago. A mass struggle involving 10,000 workers threatened to bring Bhilai to a standstill. Frightened, the authorities had to free Neogy.

Neogy was given a thundering mass welcome. Speaking at the rally he urged the workers to spread the call for liberation.

The contractors who were in collusion with the authorities have met with a sharp rebuff from Neogy whom they tried to bribe with Rs. 1,50,000.

One thing, apart from the militant movement of the workers, that deserves special mention is the role of the local press. The falsity of the allegations of so-called violent Naxalite activities brought against Neogy was exposed to the fullest extent. However, in a press statement Neogy made it clear that he believed in the path of 'constructive violence'—the path shown by Mao Tsetung.

A CORRESPONDENT
Rajhara, Durg, MP

July 30, 1977

Bihar

THE KILLING CONTINUES

ARUN SINHA

On September 21 night, three landless peasants were killed in Pipra village of East Champaran district in an 'encounter' with the police. This was the third killing of alleged Naxalites under the Chhaudadano police station in ten weeks. On July 3, the police tortured to death Gambhira Sah, the most beloved leader of the peasants and labourers of Chhaudadano. On September 5, an armed mob of feudal lords encircled the Sukhlahia village in the presence of the police and shot or burnt to death five labourers, including an old widow.

While in Champaran, the police-feudal combine has declared an open war against the resisting peasant-labour organisation, in Bhojour district the campaign has been cunningly camouflaged. There the poor peasants and labourers are being killed in '*kaldoot abhiyan*", under which policemen have been asked by the Chief Minister, Mr Karpoori Thakur, to act as messengers of *Yamraj*, the mythical Hindu death-god.

Clearly the definition of encounters as well as of Naxalites has not changed under Janata regime. The Karpoori regime stood exposed in less than a month when it commended the police action in killing Gambhira Sah, for he was "a long-wanted criminal, dacoit and murderer" and so on.

Gambhira had mobilised the people against the big landlords of Champaran—who are feudal, true to the classical definition—under the Khetihar Kisan Mazdoor Sangh (KKMS) in preparation for '*Komnist Kranti*,' as the illiterate villagers would call it. When the organised strength of the KKMS tended to become insuperable, the feudals of Champaran called the police. The police were posted at the *math* of Darpa, the village that strategically was most suitable for the offensive because of its location at the centre of villages organised under

the KKMS. The police came in June. Within a fortnight the offensive began with the pre-dawn capture of Gambhira Sah and his five comrades.

The official attitude has not veered a little even after the massacre of five labourers including an old widow, committed by the big landlords of Chhaudadano on September 5, barely two months after the murder of Gambhira Sah, their leader. The massacre has been suppressed by the Government and the press ; the urban middle class, which never cared for the rural poor while partaking in the Bihar movement is too preoccupied with the Barahiya affair. The police bosses in Patna say : "No reason to worry—they were Naxalites."

Nevertheless the crime and violence meted out to the poor starving peasants of Chhaudadano have rocked the whole of Champaran. The role of the police is itself quite clear. The police force is posted at the *math* of Darpa. The policemen eat, drink, sleep and feast at the expense of the Mahanth. How can you expect these policemen to spurn hospitality ? The police serve as a protection force there for the big landlords of Chhaudadano.

It was the section of the police posted at the *math*, which had, at the instance of the Mahanth and other big feudals, killed Gambhira Sah. It was again the same police which connived with the big landlords while they ransacked the Sukhlahia bustee and killed five people. The big landlords and their mercenaries, in broad daylight, encircled the bustee, broke into several hovels and dragged out many mazdoors ; they beat them one and all, men, women and children, with rifle butts, lathis and other weapons. The armed landlords first entered the hovel of the 70-year-old widow, Manmatia, dragged her out and asked, 'Where are your sons, the Naxalites ?' They caught her by her hair and pulled her up. Manmatia broke into tears : 'I don't know, I don't know.' The landlords began kicking her ; the mercenaries used lathis on her. Groups of armed attackers caught hold of four others in their hovels—Ramdeo Ram, Mosadi Mian, Madan Mahto

and Ramlal Chamar. The orgy was indescribable, with the landlords and their mercenaries using all their physical prowess, and cries of women and children rending the sky.

The police were at the Darpa *math* barely a hundred yards away. Eyewitnesses said the policemen came out of the *math* and watched the carnage with amusement while the magistrate managed to be absent. The immediate pretext that the big landlords found to attack the bustee was the hacking to death of Ramji Mahto, an agent of the Mahanth of Darpa, who was supposed to have played a key part in the plot for the capture of Gambhira Sah. Within hours of this murder, the Mahanth called in the zamindars of Pipra, Darpa, Sukhlahia and a number of other villages near and far. The zamindars came with their guns and gunmen ; they hurriedly met and decided to attack the mazdoor bustee of Sukhlahia and "kill all those Naxalites to restore peace". All this—the gathering of the zamindars, their meeting, their top-voiced resolution, took place near the *math,* under the very nose of the police.

After catching four 'Naxalites' and a mother of 'Naxalite sons', the orgiastic mob came out of the bustee. The captives were then shot ; one was killed on the spot. Another tried to escape ; he kept running away from an armed mob but was finally caught and shot in Pipra village, a kilometre away. Three of the captives were burnt to death—Manmatia the old widow, Ramlal Chamar and Madan Mahto.

This carnage, closely followed by the shooting of three Naxalites by the police in an "encounter" at Pipra, highlights two features of the situation prevailing in the Chhaudadano area of Champaran. One, the feudal power—economic, social and political—is very strong and ruthless. Second, this feudal power, when threatened by the peasant-labour upsurge, easily draws reinforcement from the State power. The two are, however, now facing a people, whose consciousness is being patiently revolutionised. The future has much in store.

October 15-29, 1977

Bihar

THE AWAKENING IN BHOJPUR

ARUN SINHA

The Naxalite movement in Bhojpur was exposed to the world in 1971 and intensified in the years that followed. Charu Majumdar, accused of 'left adventurism' by several leaders of the CPI(ML), had fallen from revolutionary grace. The movement had split up, stupefied by the stupendous violence of the State. But the new man in Bhojpur was not shaken ; once awake he found it impossible to stop. S. N. Singh, who hails from Dhamar village of Bhojpur, was branded 'revisionist'. To the new man the meaning of 'revisionism' was clear : showing your back to the enemy. Bhojpur forgot SNS.

Charu Majumdar is dead. The rest of the CPI(ML) leadership, after giving up his path is at the crossroads. Some have started moving in the opposite direction, along the Westminster boulevard. Some others are too stupefied to move at all. Bihar too is all quiet. All the six of the 16 members of the State Committee of the CPM, who took the revolutionary plunge after the 1967 fallout, are out of the scene. Nripen Chakravarty is dead ; Toofan Chandra Josh is now running the Nehru Yuvak Kendra in Sahar ; Sriman Narayan Jha has retired to his home in Bhagalpur for a quiet life ; Shiv Shankar Pahadi is in agriculture at his home in Bhabhua ; Prithviraj Singh a founder-member of the Bihar CPM who toed the Nagi Reddy line, is reported to be mentally retarded ; and S. N. Singh however big the publicity he gets in the Indian press as 'general secretary' of the CPI(ML), has lost his credentials as a revolutionary leader and does not have a single supporter in Bihar, particularly in Bhojpur, his home district.

The revolutionary movement should have thus died leaderless in Bihar. But instead, it first engulfed the whole of Bhoj-

pur district, expanded to Patna district and now to Champaran. Why ? In Bhojpur, all the movements, led by socialists or communists so far, were personality-based. If the leader chose to retreat, the whole movement would burst like a needled balloon. S. N. Singh could have been the one leader of stature for the cadres of Bhojpur, but soon after action had been launched in the district the split came in November 1971 ; all the cadres of Bhojpur stayed with Charu Majumdar. With S. N. Singh discarded, the cadres found themselves without a 'big' leader, and with this came the realisation that a great responsibility had now devolved on the local leadership.

At the time of the Majumdar-Singh split, the one man who had risen to a second line of leadership was Jagdish Mahto, a science teacher at H. D. Jain High School, Arrah. This 30-year old son of a poor peasant of Ekwari village in Sahar block had never been a member of any communist party. He took his first revolutionary lesson from the Naxalbari holocaust. It is remarkable to note how this school teacher, who rose as the father figure of the Bhojpur movement, was transformed.

February 12, 1967, was the day of polling in the Sahar reserved (Scheduled Caste) constituency in the fourth general elections to the Bihar Assembly. Mainly the fight was between Rajdeo (Praja Socialist Party), sponsored by upper-caste landlords and Ram Naresh Ram (CPI), the mukhiya of Ekwari, the village of Jagdish Mahto, who was openly backed by lower caste peasants and labourers. The election stirred up Ekwari, a village of 6,000 people and drew a sharp line between the landlords and the peasant-labourer mobilisation. Jagdish Mahto, popularly known as 'Master' because of his teaching background, vigorously campaigned for the CPI candidate. A peasant of low caste, he had been speaking against the landlords for some years and propagating among the peasants and slaves that no change was possible unless they walked with heads held high. Naturally, this poor men's hero was a dangerous villain to the landlords. So, when on polling day the Master objected to rigging by the biggest landlord, Nathuni

Singh, at a booth, he was so brutally assaulted that he had to stay in hospital for five months. By the time he left the hospital news had started radiating from Naxalbari.

The Master, on return to his village, prepared the oppressed for another confrontation with the landlords and called for a strike of labourers for higher wages. The strike went on for some days but then flopped as a result of machinations by landlords. The Master was taunted by them.

The landlords of Ekwari seemed invincible. Numerically, they were a minority, but they had a hundred licensed or country-made guns ; the Sone canal had highly increased their farm produce ; they had their sons in high posts in the bureaucracy, and of course, spokesmen in the legislature. For hundreds of years they had the major part of the village land and employed the majority of the population as slaves or semi-slaves.

Put yourself in the position of a slave in Ekwari and you will understand the urge to reach out for a gun. You are not considered a man at all. Born a slave, your life is strictly tied to spade, sickle and the lord's feet : you produce everything that the lord boasts of, yet your children are drumming the aluminium plates. Everyday one landlord or the other takes away your wife and your daughters. If your working daughter is not spoiled in the fields in the day, the son of some lord will break into your single-room mud hovel in the night and humiliate her right there ; for you the best course is to feign deep slumber. How long, you will ask yourself, I will live like this ? Is this my fate ?

No ! And that means Naxalbari. The Master one day carried a Hindu scripture to the school. "Read this," he told a fellow teacher : "Even *Manusmriti* forbids humiliation of *shudra* women." Later, the Master read Ambedkar and approached the fellow teacher, "I am publishing a paper for Harijans. Will you help me ?" The periodical, which the Master named *Harijanistan* (the Harijan homeland), did not survive a couple of issues. Then one evening a torchlight procession of

Harijans was taken out in the streets of Arrah with the slogan : '*Harijanistan le ke rahenge, le ke rahenge*'. (We will have a homeland of Harijans.) The man who led the march was the Master. That was 1968.

Think of the Master's anguish. He asserted the democratic process and he was hospitalised for five months. He failed in the wage strike. Worried about the poor man's condition, he tried to tell the world about them through a newspaper but could not for lack of money and response. He tried a democratic protest through the torchlight procession and came out thoroughly disillusioned. A fellow teacher recalled that a few months after the Harijan procession, the Master started reading Lenin, and newspaper reports datelined Calcutta, Siliguri, Midnapore.

Ever since he joined the school, the Master had been going to Ekwari, his village, on leave. As he suffered from chronic dysentery nobody in the school suspected how the science teacher was using his leave. Towards the end of 1969, his leaves became more frequent. That year, 'mysterious' incidents started occurring at Ekwari. Some day a haystack in the landlord's barn would be set on fire, another day someone's crops were found cut. Reports of these incidents had started reaching Arrah. Soon after that the Master applied for three months' leave and never returned.

The huts of Ekwari were rocked by a social quake : the old psyche was gone. Every peasant, every slave resurrected himself. Even Rameshwar Ahir, the ex-armyman who had taken to banditry, became fighter for a cause. The children trained themselves as innocuous looking spies ; the women resolved to rebuff the debauchee. The Master took Rameshwar Ahir as his companion and began awakening the other villages.

January 31, 1971, saw the launching of the Naxalite campaign of "annihilation of class enemies" in Bhojpur. That day, at nightfall, Sheopujan Singh, a middle peasant acting as a "mercenary of the landlords", was found murdered beside the Sone canal outside Ekwari village. It was this murder which

drew the attention of the police to the Naxalite movement in Bhojpur. In the case were implicated the Master, Rameshwar Ahir and 40 peasants and labourers of the village. Some were arrested but the Master and Rameshwar absconded. That year three more landlords or their mercenaries were done to death in the Sahar block.

What was happening in Bhojpur ? In 1971, one day the Master came to Arrah, to see his fellow teacher. "I know, brother", he told him, "that I am going to die one of these days. But I will die partly satisfied. For, one change that our movement has brought about is that landlords now do not dare touch the women of the poor. And this is not a small change." The Master had summed up the achievement of the Naxalite movement. End of social oppression had become the movement's first milestone. In simple terms, the Harijans and low-caste peasants and slaves had balanced the feudal contempt with the hatred of the oppressed and thus established a new human equation in the very first phase. Move out anywhere in Bhojpur today, you will meet landlords who will say : 'Oh God ! Who will risk maltreating the Harijans today ?" Evidently this is a statement under duress, a view formed after the boomerang. But it could not have been otherwise. The Harijan had to force his acceptability as a man. This was impossible without reversing the use of the gun.

This was the first lesson from Jagdish Master. 'Become a man ; change your existence.' Then followed a practical lesson. "This is a gun, the weapon of subjugation. Hold this straight, go and deliver poetic justice." After the Master had left the school, he himself frequently practised it.

On December 9, 1972, he went to a village along with Rameshwar and a few others to challenge a class enemy. The enemy was a terror in the area. A big Rajput landlord, he beat or shot any peasant, any labourer, on his whims ; every day he needed a new woman and lifted the wife, sister or daughter of any peasant or labourer of low castes. When the Master arrived in the village with his comrades the tyrant was

drinking toddy in a hut. They waited at a betel shop for him to come out. In the meantime a man came to the shop and asked for betel. The Master told the betel shopkeeper : "Give me first. I came earlier." The man turned, frowning, "I am taking the betel for Babu Saheb. Others can wait." "Who is this Babu Saheb here ?"—the Master spoke very loudly so that the landlord might hear and come out of the hut. The trick worked, a proud and drunken Babu Saheb came out, flinging out all sorts of filthy abuses. "Who is the person here that doesn't know me ?" The Babu Saheb could speak no more. A revolver clicked at his chest, once, twice, thrice.

The air was frozen. When the people present there recovered from the deep shock, someone cried out, "Oh ! This is Master". The Naxalites left, knowing full well that the tyrant's men were chasing them. The event took place in the evening and they ran and ran, through the evening. When night fell the pursuers lost their track.

The Master and his comrades took shelter at Behea. Early in the morning, before moving, they stopped to take tea at a shop in Behea bazaar. They had not taken many sips when a shout rent the tranquil air of dawn, "Oh, Master !!" It was a man of the tyrant. Immediately he switched over to the cry of "dacoit, dacoit !" and not without reason, for if he had continued shouting "Master" the people would have died to protect him. The Master, though very few had seen him, had become a household name, the very invocation of which enthused the hearts of the poor and oppressed in Bhojpur. When the tyrant's men in chorus shouted "dacoit' dacoit !" the Master ran towards the Mahthin Dai temple, and crossing it reached the Musahar Toli, the ghetto of Harijans of Ayar village. The Harijans had heard the cries and come out with their lathis. Before the Master could say anything, one of the Harijans struck him on the head, making him unconscious. More lathis fell on the frail body. The Master was lynched.

When the Master's wife heard of the incident she wept. "Not a single tear would have dropped from my eyes had he

been killed by some landlord or the police." The Harijans of Musahar Toli, when they came to know that they had killed the Master, and not a dacoit, were stunned. A deep gloom descended over the entire ghetto. Nobody ate for three days in mourning.

The Naxalite movement in Bihar is believed to have begun from Musahari in Muzaffarpur district in 1967. It unleashed repressed hatred in other areas of Muzaffarpur, and then spread to entire North Bihar. From 1969, South Bihar took the plunge ; industrial towns like Jamshedpur, Dhanbad and Ranchi were rocked by hand grenades. In 1970, the police recognised as activists 30 workers of the Heavy Engineering Corporation, Ranchi, 20 employees of the thermal power station, Chandrapura, Dhanbad, 40 railway workers and 70 employees of the State government. That year, for the first time in Patna, on April 25, bombs were thrown at the "Save Democracy" convention. Followed by some other explosions, the violence got to its first crest on August 7, when an anti-Mao student procession was attacked near Patna College unleashing street fighting between the Maoists and anti-Maoists. Scared by all this, a local newspaper had wondered "whether like Calcutta this town was also going to be a permanent abode of Naxalites."

By 1970, all the districts of Bihar, barring Bhojpur, had seen indignant landless peasants and impatient students taking up arms. Between January-July 1970, the police arrested 954 Naxalite suspects, the number being highest at 468 in Singhbhum district followed by Muzaffarpur with 170, Monghyr with 102 and Champaran with 88. On October 8, 1970, an extra-ordinary meeting of the Bihar Cabinet, called to review the Naxalite upsurge, resolved to give "special powers" to the police, "modernise" the CID and to enforce the Preventive Detention Act. While discussing if it would be possible to provide jeeps to "all the 571 police stations" in the State, the Cabinet, presided over by the then Congress Chief Minister, Mr Daroga Prasad Rai, also decided to set up "special police

cells in Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Monghyr and Jamshedpur where Naxalites had assumed menacing proportions."

The Naxalite movement in Bihar suffered a great setback as a result of the police onslaught on behalf of the landlords. But by the time everybody like J. C. Johari was saying that "fortunately the Naxalite movement started petering out after a short span of three years" (*Naxalite Politics in India*, Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies, New Delhi), Bhojpur shot into fame after 1971. Preparations, no doubt, had been going on since Naxalbari. The Bihar CPM had lost 600 of its 2500 workers in the 1967 fallout, about 400 of whom belonged to Bhojpur alone. The Bhojpur cadres were then headed by S. N. Singh, who was to become the Secretary, Bihar unit of the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries and later, of the CPI (ML). In 1968-69, these cadres took the message from Naxalbari to the interior, while local committees were set up in Arrah, the district headquarters, and towns like Buxar, Piro, Dumraon. The first exposure of Naxalite presence in Bhojpur came towards the end of 1969 when slogans of revolution were found written on the walls in Arrah. In February 1970, was organised the first State conference of the CPI(ML) at Kudra in old Bhojpur. Charu Majumdar attended the conference and later toured Arrah and some villages. Then began the awakening.

One should first try to understand the conditions which forced the oppressed in Bhojpur to take up a gun. Feudalism here is as old and ossified as everywhere in the country. A burden imposed by tax-gatherers, kings and emperors has been borne by peasants and labourers all along in history. Bhojpur saw frequent wars between kings, the sole aim of either party being the tax from the peasantry. It was for tax that Sher Shah, with his capital at Rohtasgarh in old Bhojpur, had killed many zamindars and sold their wives and children into slavery in the early 16th century. In 1634, Pratap Rudra Singh, king of Bhojpur, fought the troops of Shahjehan on the question of revenue. Dhira Singh, son of the Zamindar of Baranwan,

'rebelled' against Aurangzeb in the 1670s, for the Mughal emperor had taken him to Delhi as hostage when his father refused to pay the arrears of revenue.

In the Permanent Settlement of 1793, practically the whole of modern Bhojpur was entrusted by the British to a single royal family, presided over by the Maharaja of Dumraon, Vikramjit Singh. The Maharaja heavily taxed the peasantry and barbarously collected special tariffs on the occasion of any birth, wedding or death in his family. He was only carrying on a family tradition. Before the Permanent Settlement the British had chosen Dost Dewan Singh of Dumraon lineage for rent collection in Bhojpur. This zamindar collected as rent over 75 per cent of the produce from the peasants, a rate which was far greater than the 56 per cent that the Bihar revenue chief of the East India Company had fixed in 1770. After the Permanent Settlement, the Maharaja of Dumraon went many steps farther in the matter of exactions.

In 1835, the Bengal Tenancy Act was passed. The ryots of Bhojpur, then part of Bengal province, tried to take advantage of the legislation, unsuccessfully. The Maharaja and his tax-gatherers reacted by increasing the rent, and mercilessly realising it with the help of their private armies.

In 1924-25, 'tension' was reported in certain villages under Dumraon estate. In 1931-32 there was 'discontent' in the estate owing to exaction of very high '*salami*' (the tribute one paid for having the honour of meeting the lord, for instance). In the 1930s the communists, the socialists, the Kisan Sabha, began organising the tenants in the district ; by that time the Congress had passed a resolution calling for the end of zamindari. For fear of losing property and power, the landlords evicted a large number of sharecroppers and dispossessed many peasants of their land.

In 1956, the Congress Government in the State abolished zamindari. The tax-gatherers, however, only technically disappeared ; the social, economic and political powers of the landlord remained still absolute ; slave labour, sharecropping,

social oppression of the low castes, economic parasitism and a thousand other features of feudalism were very much there. Violence was inherent in such a society. For how can one man become a slave to another, without resort to force by the latter ? The landlords, in order to enforce their will had armed might.

Lethal weapon was what the kings had used throughout history to keep the tax-payers under constant terror. Loyalty to the British had brought guns to the Bhojpur landlords ; similar relations with the Congress was to drive them nearer the arsenal. After Independence, as the threat to their power steadily mounted, they were not satisfied with the weapons made legally available to them. There flourished, under their open patronage, the home production of guns. Today, every landlord in Bhojpur worth the name possesses a licensed gun and an unknown number of home-made ones. There are 16 blocks in the district and an official estimate puts the number of guns held by landlords at 500 per block—which means that Bhojpur's feudal army has a strength of 8,000 guns at the least. Considering that each landlord has a minimum of half a dozen soldiers for his protection, the strength of the feudal army should come to about 50,000 men.

When such a powerful army is terrorising the majority of the society in Bhojpur in no ways different from the royal troops in the past, when the 2,000-strong police force is doubling the oppresssion, what is there to wonder at if the majority resorts to a violent counter-offensive ? There has always been an urge among the oppressed in Bhojpur to meet force with force, in desperation. Naxalbari merely egged them on. Some time ago, there used to be a king, Ranpal Singh, in Bhojpur, whose fiat it was that every newly-wed girl be initiated by him. The subjects found this revolting, but did not dare oppose him. One day, Mahthin Dai, a bride, refused to go with the king, inviting an encounter in which the king was done to death. In the clash also died the husband of Mahthin who then chose to become a *sati*. As a memorial to her bravery, the people built the Mahthin temple at Behea in central Bhojpur.

Mahthin became a deity, not a people's heroine. But the thread was picked up by the Naxalites and Mahthin was personified in hundreds of people. Consider Promila, the middle-aged Harijan woman. She, all alone, tried to chop a landlord's neck but failed and was put in Arrah jail. In November 1976, the Bihar Jail Minister, Mr Ram Ratan Ram, a Harijan, in course of a visit to the Jail, called Pramila and asked her, "Why can't you lead a quiet life ?" The Naxalite woman flared up and said, "You will know, if you come and join us."

That is the kind of person produced by the Naxalite movement in Bhojpur : fearless, dedicated, enthusiastic, revengeful. The tide of rebellion has transformed him. Such was the person who walked into the villages and induced others to become like him. And there lies the secret of local leadership in Bhojpur. Jagdish Mahto left teaching, Prabhu Harijan quit as an employee of the State Electricity Board, Nirmal Kumar fled as a fourth year student of Darbhanga Medical College, Sakaldeep Chamar deserted the Army, Fagu Mahto, after doing his M. Sc. never sought a job, Rameshwar Ahir gave up banditry.

Tens of thousands of poor people of Bhojpur, who had sought employment in the towns of Bengal, chiefly Calcutta, and south Bihar, mainly Dhanbad, Ranchi, were forced to take sides. The industrial workers and the coolies, the cobblers in Chinatown and students from Bhojpur first saw the happenings in those towns and then heard of reports from their own district ; they were jolted. Thousands of sons of peasants serve the Army and they could not remain mute spectators when their homes were burning ; they took the plunge to use differently their military skill. In Bhojpur, an average village has a dozen of ex-armymen—retired from short service commissions—living as small peasants or labourers. Many of them have joined the Naxalite movement.

Today, the Naxalites have raised a "Red Army" which has an unknown number of wholetime soldiers trained in all methods of warfare possible under the obtaining conditions (for

this the armymen, retired or deserters, have proved of great help). They have at the local unit level—one unit comprising 2-3 villages—"self defence squads". According to the police, there are more than a hundred such squads operating in different areas of the district. One squad generally comprises half a dozen fighters and so the police estimate there must be at least 600 of them.

The 'Red Army', according to rough official estimates, has killed about 100 landlords or policemen in the last seven years ; those gravely wounded or maimed number 300. The killings came to 4 in 1971, 2 each in 1972 and 1973, 33 in 1974, 17 in 1975, 9 in 1976 and 24 in 1977 (upto November). The fatalities in the police forces included a deputy superintendent of the Central Reserve Police force. During the period the police shot 39 alleged Naxalites, including half a dozen of the suspected leading figures.

Curiously, whatever has happened in Bhojpur in the seven years of armed insurgency, the place chosen was always the village. Nothing took place in the nine towns of the district, no 'violent cultural revolution'. In Arrah, the district headquarters, the only Naxalite activity reported was a short-lived wall-writing towards the end of 1969. One of the reasons might be the non-existence of an industrial proletariat in Bhojpur ; wholly an agricultural society, the district does not have any industry worth the name.

Nor have the Naxalites here been swayed by animosity towards other organisations. While a history of mobilisation by the socialists and communists has certainly helped them, areas like Sahar, Sandesh, Tarari, Jagdishpur, where they are now entrenched can be regarded as parts of a large "virgin" area from the point of view of organised struggle. Where the "virginity" had been spoilt by legal struggle, the Naxalites have so far not found it easy to draw away the peasants and labourers. Itarhi—contemptuously called by the landlords as the "Moscow of Bhojpur"—Buxar, Dumraon, Rajpur were strongly held by the CPI and these blocks still remain the

party's strongholds. In some areas, like Piro, the socialists held the ground. In Barhara, the Socialist Unity Centre had some small organisation ; the CPM was eliminated in the 1967 delivery.

Bhojpur has been spared the fratricidal war which the communists and leftists fought among themselves in West Bengal. The Naxalites, however contemptuous they may be of the CPI reformist line, have, to date, not interfered with the party's work or workers in its bases in west Bhojpur. They have also not killed any member of the SUC, the CPM or the Socialist Party. It looks like Bhojpur has been divided for matters of organisation—west Bhojpur is held by the CPI and the rest by the CPI(ML), with small dots by socialists and the SUC, neither party trying to interfere with the other's. But one recent development must be noted. The areas of CPI organisation are increasingly facing the threat of being taken over by the Naxalite movement. The party is hard put to defend its bases from this onslaught, more so because, of late, there have been scattered reports of new ideological infiltration.

The CPI is playing a nice trick to stop the tide. Whenever any landless peasant, sharecropper or a poor peasant is attacked by some landlord in any village in west Bhojpur, the CPI leaders dash in and start championing his cause, which means informing and bringing in the police station in-charge, filing cases in courts on the poor man's behalf and bearing all the expenses. The leaders then ring up the party headquarters in Patna so that the State secretariat issues a statement to the Press 'condemning' the 'atrocity' of the landlord. It so happened at Dharampura, a village in Itarhi block in west Bhojpur when the landlords shot dead four sharecroppers on October 20, 1977. The CPI leaders were the first to reach the village, of course, with the police. The sharecroppers were consciously fighting for their occupancy rights, they were aligned to no political party but the propaganda that the landlords had made to justify their killings was that they were "all Naxalites". The CPI leaders vehemently contradicted

this, "No, they were not Naxalites. They were CPI workers." The picture that emerges from such falsehoods certainly does reveal the scare of the CPI about being swept off their feet by the Naxalite upsurge.

According to police records, the Naxalite movement has taken into its tight fold as many as 150 villages spread over 9 of the 16 blocks of Bhojpur district. In one block, Sahar, the entire population of poor peasants and labourers is believed to have joined the movement. The number of villages strongly held by Naxalites thana-wise was thus given in a statement prepared by the district police superintendent on July 10, 1975 : Sahar-39, Sandesh-29, Piro-23, Tarari-15, Jagdishpur-6, Nawanagar-6, Udwantnagar-6 and Berhampur-5. (These 8 thanas cover 9 blocks.) But such mapping could only be technically correct, for the police superintendent said, "90 per cent of the landless peasants (Harijans) of the district are sympathisers or activists of the Naxalite movement."

An attempt, too concerted to be ignored, is often made to formulate the Naxalite upsurge in Bhojpur in terms of caste oppression. It is hard to resist the temptation of making such a formulation since, in this district, all the landlords belong to the upper castes—Rajputs, Bhumihars, Brahmins and Kayasths —and all the labourers to the lower castes—the Yadavas, the Koeris, the Kurmis—and scheduled castes. Easily one can conclude that castes and classes mean the same thing here. But this will be an over-simplification. It is doubtless a fact that castes have been the same all along the course of history at either end of the agrarian system. That is, the landlords have throughout belonged to upper castes while the landless labourers always belonged to the scheduled castes. But what about the peasantry between these two extremes—the poor, small, middle and rich ?

At one time, all the upper castes might have been all landlords but not now. Many Rajputs or Brahmins are peasants in Bhojpur. Likewise, the lower castes were either poor peasants or labourers ; today several Yadavas or Koeris have risen

to well-to-do status. In short, the peasantry is now a mixture of upper and lower castes, down to the category of the poor. The point to investigate is how the impoverishment—or given the general contradictions with the landlords—of upper-caste peasants has affected the attitude towards the Naxalite movement. So far, the leaders and cadres of the movement have invariably come from the lower and scheduled castes, and classwise, generally, from the poor peasantry or landless proletariat. The experience, as yet, has been that even the poorer Rajputs or Bhumihars have fanatically supported the landlords of their own castes in the face of Naxalite organisation.

It is this caste bigotry that is proving a stumbling block to progress on the lines of "agrarian revolution" in which, what to speak of small peasants, even the rich peasantry has a crucial role to play.

Had it not been a communist ideology in command of the movement, the reaction of the low castes against the upper castes would have certainly climaxed in caste riots. This happened when the followers of Lohia organised the lower castes in Bhojpur in the sixties ; led by "socialists", the Yadavas and Koeris would fight as Yadavas and Koeris. The Naxalite movement has never nursed such a perspective. The socialists fought for 'reservations' or caste-wise share in the State power, the Naxalites intended to capture the whole of it. Seven years of upsurge has stirred up the social moorings. And recently, the poor and small peasants of upper castes have started coming into the movement or sympathising with it. Presently, one of the organisers of the Naxalite movement in the blocks of Dumraon and Jagdishpur is a young Brahmin graduate.

The violence inherent in deprivation, slavery, impoverishment, organised social oppression and torture in the society of Bhojpur and the message from Naxalbari triggered an armed uprising in 1971. Marxism-Leninism remained a subject for the leaders ; for the poor peasants and slaves it meant a gun. The oppressed man snatched one from the landlord, looked at

it and saw the bloodstains at the mouth of the barrel : the blood of his father, grandfather, great-grandfather. Hatred, intense hatred overtook him. And thus began the nemesis in Bhojpur.

The first enemy to fall was Sheopujan Singh, a mercenary of the landlords of Ekwari village of Sahar block on March 20, 1971. That year, four other landlords were liquidated in the Sahar area. In 1972, two more. The first rifle-snatching took place at the Sone canal dak bungalow at Garhani in Piro Police Station on September 10, 1972, when a section of the Bihar Armed homeguard posted at the bungalow was attacked with bombs and deprived of three rifles and 45 cartridges ; in the scuffle three homeguards were injured. This was followed by the surprising of a section of armed homeguards at Lalganj in Jagdishpur Police Station on January 3, 1973. The Naxalites took away four rifles. These incidents caused a scare among the landlords, and in the following months, escalation of police repression.

Along with the elimination of landlords, snatching of police rifles and propaganda of "Chinese path is our path", were also occurring stray incidents of seizure of food-grains. On April 26, 1973, about one hundred poor and landless peasants, their women and children, seized forty maunds of rice from a trader at Chauri village in Sahar Police Station. For two years before this seizure, Chauri had seen a struggle of agricultural labourers for higher minimum wages ; they had been getting a seer of rice since god knows what century while the landlords had multiplied their incomes. The landlords refused to raise the wages and asked those in the neighbouring villages not to employ the Chauri labourers. In course of the wage struggle, a Naxalite committee was believed to have been set up. In the struggle, strong local leadership emerged, captained by a labourer, Ganeshi Dusadh. The landlords, much angered by the rupture of 'cordial' relations with the labourers, had been waiting for an opportunity to liquidate the whole of the labour leadership. The seizure of food-grains provided one.

Initially, however, nobody—neither the trader nor the policemen—suspected the hand of Naxalites. After some days, the landlords of Chauri were believed to have approached the police with information that the looted foodgrains were kept in the hovels of the Harijans. On May 6, over 50 armed policemen, aided by landlords with guns, encircled the Harijan tola and started beating men, women and children with lathis and rifle butts. The Harijans tried to resist, with lathis, sickles, and physically. The landlords pointed out Ganeshi Dusadh to the police ; he was dragged out of the ghetto and shot at. Ganeshi, still alive, was dragged towards the Sone canal where two landlords mounted on his chest and with a dagger tore up his stomach to make sure of his death. Lalmohan Dusadh, Balkesar Dusadh and Dinanath Teli, the three other labour leaders, were also shot at and pulled like carcasses to the standing police van and tortured to death.

The police called it an "encounter" with Naxalites in which they had to shoot in "self-defence". They said, that in the hovels of the Harijan tola they had found bombs, rifles, and all sorts of weapons, that the Naxalites had attacked them and that they had built "Pill boxes" in the village from where they fired upon the policeman. "Pill Boxes" ? In Chauri, as in other villages, the children had built a roofless small box-type mud structure for collecting mangoes. This was a very old and normal thing.

The police repression at Chauri raised a great furore all over Bihar, compelling the Government to set up judicial commission manned by Girija Nandan Prasad, a retired judge of Patna High Court. The commission's report, made public in March 1976, justified the police action, saying that "the persons who faced the police party and attacked them were not ordinary criminals but they were quite familiar with the Naxalite principles and aims and well-trained in guerilla warfare."

After the killing, the landlords of Chauri were emboldened. A 50-strong police force was posted at the village high school. The landlords said they would not employ the labourers,

neither would the landlords of neighbouring villages. This caused a reverse action ; the labourers of neighbouring villages resolved not to work for the landlords of Chauri and started helping their starving brethren with foodgrains. Antagonism built up in Chauri and the neighbouring five villages between the labourers and the landlords. The Chauri landlords then ruled that the labourers could neither graze their cattle nor use any part of the land. The bans and oppression increased.

The year 1974 saw an unprecedented scale of Naxalite action. In all, 80 cases were recorded, compared to 8, 7 and 10 in 1971, 1972 and 1973, involving 33 murders, 14 attempts to murder, 18 dacoities, robberies and 13 arson and group assaults. On March 14, the Naxalites attacked an armed police camp at Chilhous village in Sandesh Police Station, injured four Jawans and escaped with three rifles, a bayonet and 11 cartridges. On March 21, another police camp was attacked in Kesath village in Nawanagar Police Station in which three policemen were wounded and one rifle was taken away.

Police repression sharply mounted. On the night of August 17, a DSP led a police party into Baruhi village of Sahar on information that a poor peasant, Shyamlal Mahto, had been providing shelter and "training place" for the Naxalites at his house. The police encircled Shyamlal's house, shot dead Muni Pasi, a landless labourer, and called him 'a Naxalite'.

The Naxalites continued attacking the police. The most daring attack was made on December 19 at about 7 p. m., at the Sahar circle guard by a group of 20 Naxalites. The attackers positioned themselves on either side of the guards and fired. The fire was returned and the exchange went on for several minutes. One attacker was killed, the toll on the police side included a policeman and a police van driver, who was cooking meals. The Naxalites fled away with one police rifle. Finding that the State armed police and homeguards were unable to face "guerilla warfare", the Government requisitioned four companies of the CRP for Bhojpur in August 1974.

In 1975, prior to the proclamation of emergency in June the Naxalites had killed 11 "class enemies". On the other hand, with the CRP reinforcement the Bhojpur police started a village-to-village campaign of liquidation of the insurgents. On January 14, CRP drove into Pather village of Piro Police Station and in an "encounter" (with no casualties to the police), shot dead Rameshwar Ahir and Amavash Chamar. Rameshwar was known to be a leading man of the Bhojpur movement ; an ex-armyman, he had been a close associate of Jagdish Mahto, the movement's father figure. Amavash Chamar was a landless labourer.

On April 3, the police encircled at night Chapra village in Piro Police Station. The siege lasted the whole night, in which fire was exchanged ceaselessly between the police and the Naxalites but "fortunately" again, no policeman was injured. The police continued asking the hiding Naxalites to surrender. When in the morning, four of them—Asgu, Sheo Narayan, Lal Mohan and Vishwanath—came out and surrendered, the police made all of them stand at a distance and gunned them down one by one. All of them were landless peasants.

On April 9, the police arrested Hiranand Dusadh, a landless peasant at Arrah, and shot him dead in the night. After midnight of May 14, two sections of CRP, headed by two sub-inspectors patrolling the Dullamchak village in Sahar Police Station, when the "Naxalites" fired upon them, injuring the sub-inspector, B. B. Lal. On hearing this, the Sahar Police Station in-charge rushed to Dullamchak with two more platoons of CRP. At dawn, the village was encircled by a heavy police force and two "Naxalites" were shot dead. About this encounter, Baburao Chandawar, the Sarvodaya leader who then toured Bhojpur said : "The report of encounter is false. The fact is, on May 13, police was posted in Dullamchak village in view of the clash between two landlords, Rajnath Rai and Ram Rai. On May 15 morning, Bachan Ahir, a poor peasant of Adhmuan village, went to Dr Kamla Rai of Dullamchak and was called a Naxalite. Before many a pair of eyes the doctor

shot at him. The brother of the doctor speared him. Bachan Ahir died there. In the night, the CRP men—posted in the village—dragged out a landless peasant Gopal Chamar and killed him. They then caught Rameshwar Ahir, who was returning from visit to some relatives in another village, and shot him dead. Rameshwar Ahir had, a year before, organised and led a strike of landless peasants of Dullamchak for higher wages. The landlords were angry with him".

"Naxalite" had become, in the vocabulary of the police and landlords a word to describe any landless or poor peasant walking with his head high and talking like a man, not as a slave. They together sought to clear Bhojpur of such men, breaking into every home in the Harijan ghetto. The flush-out campaign, begun at Chauri, got into full tempo after the arrival of the CRP. By the early months of 1975, sections of police were posted in a number of villages and in the houses of big landlords. The omnipresence of the police encouraged the landlords to no end. Much earlier they had singled out three poor peasants in Dullamchak. The landlords of Hadiabad in Jagdishpur Police Station now caught a young labourer, Ram Bishwas Mahto, on March 26, and burnt him to death. There could be no question of police arresting any landlord, for Ram Bishwas was a "well-known Naxalite". But when Hari Singh, the mukhiya of Ayar, was killed two weeks later the police raided the Harijan ghetto and took away a number of labourers. On June 2, the landlords besieged the Harijan ghetto of Hadiabad and set all the 26 houses on fire, not allowing any of the 109 men, women and children to come out. When the news reached the police, the officers, knowing full well that they would lose their jobs if a hundred Harijans died in one incident, rushed to the village and put out the fire. But by then, landlords had singled out the landless peasant Bhuteli Chamar for being "a close associate of Fagu Mahto, the Naxalite leader" and burnt him to death.

Exactly a week after the CRP men had killed two landless peasants in Dullamchak on the night of May 14-15, the

Naxalites ambushed a jeep near the village at about eight in the night. The jeep, which carried a CRP officer, a Bihar police sub-inspector and three CRP jawans, was driving at high speed but a bullet punctured one of its tyres. One CRP jawan was killed, another got a bullet in his jaws and the third in his forearm. "The Naxalites", said an official report, "by attacking a running jeep had shown great daring. This was their first attack on the CRP." On June 23, another jeep carrying a section of Bihar armed police and a magistrate was fired upon by the Naxalites at Pianian village in Sahar Police Station, without causing any casualty.

It was about time the emergency was to be clamped. Jagannath Mishra had taken over as Chief Minister on April 11. It would be worth noting how he tackled the Bhojpur movement in the bare two months of his tenure before the emergency. The Bihar State Committee of the CPM at the conclusion of its two-day meeting on June 5-6 "expressed its concern and resentment over unprecedented repression let loose against landless labourers ever since the Ministry headed by Jagannath Mishra was installed in power." The State executive committee of the CPI said, on June 3: "The recent spurt of so-called Naxalite activities in certain pockets of the districts of Patna and Bhojpur underlines the extreme gravity of the agrarian situation of the State.....Even though the State Government recognizes in words that the present problem cannot be dealt with as a mere law and order problem but has to be solved by implementing land reforms, in practice the Government has confined itself to intensifying police action against the landless and the poor. It is a matter of shame that while the Harijans and the landless are being arrested in hundreds not a single landlord has been arrested for committing numerous crimes against the poor."

The double-face of the State Government was fully exposed when on the one hand, on June 4, it set up a "social injustice eradication committee", whose "first task" would be to tour the "Naxalite-infested areas of Bhojpur and Patna districts with

a view to creating goodwill and restoring confidence among all sections of the society," and on the other, it announced a major policy of providing "every able-bodied person" in the families of landlords with a gun for protection against "anti-social elements" in Bhojpur and Patna districts. The policy of liberally distributing guns to landlords was denounced by the CPM, the socialists and democrats. Even such a bourgeois paper as *The Statesman*, in its leader titled "Naxalite Revival?" on June 13, said, "...but even more to be deplored is the reported Bihar decision to provide firearms to all able-bodied men in Bhojpur and Patna. This surely is an invitation to civil strife..." Nevertheless, the State Government went ahead and dumped more arms in Bhojpur ; besides, it undertook a series of "target classes" for training thousands in the use of guns. The training campaign was to continue during the emergency, the police instructors moving from one cluster of villages to another. No wonder, the "social injustice eradication committee", which was to be "a permanent body", was never heard of.

The emergency gave the police a carte blanche. It could arrest anyone, for Naxalite organisations had been banned ; it could kill anyone, ransack any village, without the least fear of exposure in the Press or of democratic opinion. It was during the emergency that the Bhojpur police launched "Operation Thunder" to liquidate the Naxalites and their alleged strong-holds. It searched out the best of the movements' leaders and killed them. Among those shot was Subroto Dutt (alias Johar), the general secretary of the pro-Charu anti-Lin faction of the CPI(ML).

The killings began with an encounter only four days after the emergency was clamped. Nobody knew on June 29 evening that the skirmish which would occur between the CRP and the Naxalite guerillas at Bahuara village in Sahar, was going to be the longest in the then four-year-old history of armed insurgency in Bhojpur. Eight guerillas and peasants were killed. But the CRP also lost four men, including Samant

Singh, the daring DSP who less than four weeks ago had alone killed, with an LMG, 11 of the 15 alleged Naxalites in the Ghorahuwan village in Masaurhi Police Station of Patna district. Once the 74-hour skirmish drew to a close, the CRP men folded up and left Bhojpur in spite of, as an official source said, persistent request by the district authorities that they should stay on. "We have lost our cream. Of what staff are these Naxalites made ?"—the CRP in-charge was reported to have said before leaving. The vacuum created was soon filled by the Madhya Pradesh State Armed Force.

The June 29 incident is worth reporting in detail. A chowkidar, Suraj Ahir (who was allegedly killed by Naxalites on April 27, 1977) had informed the Sahar police that a meeting of the "Red Army" was to be held that day at Bahuara which would be attended by first-ranking leaders, Nirmal Kumar and Narayan Kavi. A strong police force drove into the village by evening and encircled a cluster of ten hovels in the Harijan ghetto. A loudspeaker was used to ask the suspected inmates to surrender. There was no response to the repeated appeals. Asking the policemen to take tactical positions, the police superintendent, Y. N. Srivastava, walked up to one of the hovels at north-end. A half-naked man of dark complexion came to the door, facing Srivastava with eyes burning with hatred and said, "We won't surrender, come what may." The police superintendent went back, took four CRP men with him and again approached the hovel : two of the CRP men carried machine-guns. They entered the hovel through the door which was ajar ; there was nobody in the yard. Srivastava tiptoed to the door of the room and craned his neck to look inside. He cocked his head back in a flash ; the man, who had rebuffed him held a gun and with his back to the door was saying something to others. Srivastava asked one machine-gun man to dash to the door and shower bullets into the room. The CRP man fired a fusillade ; but suddenly he fell down, shot dead. It perturbed the police party, and more than the death of the policeman, Srivastava was worried

about the machine-gun which the dying man had dropped at the door. It was quickly planned that the other machine-gun would continue firing, in order to provide an umbrella for another policeman who would pick up the machine-gun of the dead policeman. The machine-gun was collected, but in the exploit a DSP and a jawan of the CRP were wounded by bullets fired by the Naxalites from the room.

One death and two serious injuries demoralised the police. The ring around the ten-hovel cluster continued, as did the loudspeaker warnings. It was getting dark. The police superintendent talked on wireless to bosses in Patna, who advised him to "exercise restraint" and instead "starve the inmates". The siege continued through the night of June 29, the next day and the forenoon of July 1. On June 30, it rained heavily, drenching the policemen. On July 1, the police decided to set the hovels on fire, to force the inmates out. Kerosene-soaked fire balls were hurled at the thatched roofs. The fire did not catch for the roofs were damp with the rain. The police, harrassed beyond measure, then decided to face the Naxalites straight. They entered the cluster by night, aided by high-power light. The firing from both sides went on all night, till morning. The police killed seven Naxalites or helpers and last four of its men. After all was quiet, the policemen started combing the neighbouring houses in the village—on July 2, morning—and saw a limping man moving out. The man was caught and brought before the officers. "Butan : He is Butan", one of the local policemen, recognising the man, shrieked. Butan Musahar, once a landless peasant, had risen to the position of a 'commander' of the 'Red Army' ; he was a prize catch come unexpectedly. The police superintendent wanted to confirm. "Yes, I am Butan," the lame man said with pride, "I do command the Red Army. So what ?" The CRP men shot him down at pointblank range.

The police carried on its liquidation campaign. On November 29, an armed police party ransacked Babu Bahan village in Sahar and found out and murdered in a hovel of the Harijan

ghetto, Subroto Dutt, the general secretary of pro-Charu, anti-Lin faction of the CPI(ML), and two of Bhojpur's leading revolutionary intellectuals, Nirmal Kumar and Rajendra Yadav. Babu Bahan was not a Naxalite-affected village in the police record but the police had got a tip-off about a leaders' conference there. On December 3, another leader, Jawahar, was shot dead along with five others, including two women at Pinjori in Sandesh Police Station. On December 31, a section of the Bihar Military Police posted at Bhadwar village in Berhampur thana fired on a group of attackers and killed one of them ; a policeman also died.

The police hounded out Narayan Kavi, a leading light of the Bhojpur movement, at Hanuman-Chapra village in Sahar on March 31, 1976, and shot him dead. In May 1976, the police launched "Operation Thunder", and arrested Prabhu Harijan, who quit as an employee of the Arrah Electricity Board to become the number one man after the death of most of the finest corps of local revolutionary intellectuals ; and Rameshwar Dusadh, a close associate of Narayan Kavi.

On the other side, the insurgents also carried on their actions. On March 13, a landlord, Nanku Singh of Babu Bandh village of Sahar was done to death ; on March 26, another landlord was killed at Pande-Dehri village in Piro Police Station. Two days later, the Naxalites attacked the house of a police sub-inspector at Baidakuri village in Piro and took away a gun after killing his wife and son. On April 17, the doctor of the Sahar block was murdered along with his wife for being an informer for the police and his gun was taken away. On May 8, two landlords were shot dead at Sikrahata village in Piro. On May 24, a dafadar was shot and wounded in the thigh for informing the police about the presence of Rameshwar Dusadh in Semraon village in Piro. In July, a jeep was ambushed at an unknown place and two men of the Bihar Military Police were killed. In October 1976, on Dussehra day, two policemen who were listening to a rural concert at Dhansoi village in Rajpur Police Station were injured

but their guns could not be snatched by the Naxalites. In November, an outpost at Kesath village in Nawanagar Police Station was attacked with bombs. When the elections to the Lok Sabha were announced, the Naxalites of Bhojpur distributed a pamphlet which said, "Boycott the elections. Accelerate the attack on the military. Build base areas in the countryside ; build a Red Army for armed struggle" (as translated from Hindi). On June 13, an evening before the last day of polling, a polling party was attacked at Ayar village in Piro. One rifle was taken away.

The movement has suffered many setbacks. Most of the first crop of local leaders—Jagdish Mahto, Nirmal Kumar, Narayan Kavi, Fagu Mahto, Rajendra Yadav, Rameshwar Ahir and Chamku Musaha—have been killed ; Prabhu Harijan and Rameshwar Dusadh are detained. Bhojpur is packed with men from the Bihar Military Police, Madhya Pradesh State Armed Force, Bihar Armed Police and Bihar Armed Homeguards ; sections of policemen are posted in about 50 villages—in the houses of the big landlords and schools. The landlords, who possess an unknown quantity of legal and illegal arms and ammunition, have organised themselves in "village resistance groups" which patrol the "troubled villages" by night. They keep getting guns and training liberally from the government.

Doubtless, the movement has instilled a new consciousness in the landless or poor peasants all over the district. Practically, the entire population of landless and poor peasants—roughly 40 per cent of the total—has come to sympathise with the movement. This widescale sympathy has made the task difficult for the Naxalite-hunting police, for it is almost impossible to extract any information from them about the insurgents. Besides, children, old women and men have set up an intelligence network for the Naxalites and this has proved far superior to the police espionage. Seven years of armed insurgency has struck fear among the landlords. But one thing must be pointed out. While the landless and poor peasants are all activists or sympathisers, while the insurgents

have killed many a tyrant, they have not succeeded so far in building up mass resistance to oppression and terror. They are yet to reach the primary stages of agrarian revolution.

December 24, 1977—January 14, 1978

KILLING FOR WHAT ?

ARUN SRIVASTAVA

Within a few days of the announcement by the Chief Minister, Mr Karpoori Thakur, that the number of atrocities on Harijans has come down, several incidents have taken place, the most gruesome being the one in Dharampura village of Bhojpur where an armed mob of feudal lords and toughs shot dead four landless Harijan bataidars in broad daylight.

While the bataidars are fighting for occupancy rights, the landless agricultural labourers are struggling for minimum wages. In their fight they are making use of the existing laws enacted by the Government at different times to suit the ruling class. Their combined opposition to the centuries-old social oppression has enraged the feudals. The masters are desperate.

Mahanth Ramanuj Acharya has four *maths* with their headquarters at Gharwasdih in Rohtas. Besides Dharampura, where he owns 70 acres or 20 per cent of the total cultivable land, he has some 500 acres. In fact, with all his 'religious quest', he is a big zamindar. The entire land, being within the command area of the Sone canal, is fertile. The Mahanth has entrusted supervision of his Dharampura 'estate' to one of his disciples, Ramakant Mishra. At harvesting time the Mahanth himself tours every *math* and collects fifty percent of the produce.

In spite of the land ceiling law the 25 Brahmin families owning lands ranging from 35 to 100 bighas have been ruling over the 30 Harijan landless households.

The trouble started in 1975. After the enactment of the Bataidari Act, the Mahanth bought a tractor and tried to dispense with the bataidars who had been tilling the land for over 12 years. The 30 Harijan bataidars under the leadership of Shiv Muni and Lallan Dusadh refused to be evicted. Finally, the tillers lodged a complaint with the local police. The SDO, Buxar, referred the matter to the Tripartite Agrarian Dispute Settlement Board. The committee, besides tenants, was represented by the local Congress MLA on behalf of the landowners and the BDO was present as the official nominee. The matter was finally referred to the SDO, Buxar, with the comment that the claims of the bataidars had been found legitimate. The SDO fixed October 15, as the date of judgment but due to the Durga Puja holidays it was extended to October 27.

Incidentally, in two similar cases the tenants were granted right of occupancy by the court of the SDO, Buxar. The Mahanth of Dharampura, already furious over the courage of the labourers and bataidars, anticipated the fate of the case. Deprivation of land would end his supremacy in the village. It is alleged that he, in league with the other landowners, arranged with the Kisan Majdoor Sangh (KMS), an organisation of Brahmin feudals of Buxar sub-division, to requisition the services of its armed squad.

The chief of the KMS is Srikant Pathak, a close associate of the local Congress MLA. There is not one majdoor in the Kisan Majdoor Sangh. It is said that it has formed an 80-man armed squad to liquidate the labourers and bataidars in case they challenge the feudal powers or pose an organised threat to the property of the landlords in the entire sub-division.

A night before the incident, the armed squad of the KMS was reported to have gathered in Dharampura in the house of a *chela* of the Mahanth. On October 20, at about 2 p.m. a messenger came to the house of Lallan Dusadh where Shiv Muni, just after returning from Buxar, was telling a dozen of

bataidars about the case and the talks he had with some people there about it. The messenger said that Mahanthji wanted to see Shiv Muni in order to solve the problem outside the court. The Harijans said, they would not meet him.

Within a few minutes, nearly 60 armed men surrounded the house of Lallan, pointing their guns at the sharecroppers and opened fire. Both Shiv Muni and Lallan died on the spot. Before leaving the place, the killers even injured the women. They took Sri Nayak and Sidhnath to the house of a man of the Mahanth, where they were reportedly shot. The Harijan leaders, who were of strong build, though wounded, freed themselves but were overpowered and tortured to death. Their bodies were dragged to the temple and so placed there that it appeared as if they were caught and killed while committing a dacoity. The police arrived at the scene at about 7-30 in the evening.

All the four victims were Harijan leaders, who had organised their community to fight the atrocities of the upper-caste landlords. The 31-year old Shiv Muni Ram who also contested as an independent candidate from the Rajpur Assembly constituency, had been in Buxar college for three years until circumstances forced him to abandon his studies before taking the graduation degree. His comrade-in-arms, Lallan Dusadh, was a vocal sharecropper in his early thirties.

Though in the Itarhi Block, under which Dharampura lies, the CPI has been organising the bataidars and labourers for a long time, it has not proved to be of much help to the landless Harijans. As it is weak it is unable to protect the landless Harijans and resist the armed and powerful landowners.

In Dharampura, far away from CPI influences, under the initiation of these four youths, a spontaneous movement for minimum wages had started nearly two years ago. This enraged the landowners, and subsequently the landlords under the leadership of the Mahanth set fire to the hovels of semi-starved labourers. From then on, the gap between the haves and have-nots has been on the increase. Ironically, 32 cases of

murder have been registered at one police station of Itarhi during the past two years.

After the Dharampura incident, having failed to pass it off as a case of dacoity, KMS people are trying hard to make it a case of Naxalite encounter. Srikant Pathak, the chief of the KMS, is circulating leaflets explaining that the victims of the Dharampura firing were Naxalites.

November 12, 1977

IN A 'NAXALITE-AFFECTED' VILLAGE IN BHOJPUR

ARUN SINHA

The Harijans of Semraon have a long background of servile behaviour. But they can now boldly speak and fight. The landlords think, they must have turned Naxalites. "Never before had this peace been disturbed", the mukhiya says. On October 27, 1975, a chowkidar was murdered at the booking counter of Semraon metre-gauge railway station. The landlords said, this must be the work of Naxalites and they told the police so. Following this murder, a couple of Harijans were picked up by the police. A police camp was posted in Semraon to uphold peace.

Rameshwar Dusadh absconded, for the landlords had named him the "number one Naxalite" of the area. The police or the landlords would, every other day, "search" the hovel of Dusadh tola, which houses about 100 Dusadhs. The landlords had stopped employing the Dusadhs as labourers ever since Rameshwar organised the strike. "All Dusadhs are Naxalites," the mukhiya would say. "The other Harijans—the Musahars, the Chamars, the Mehatars—are not Naxalites ; they still work for us. The Yadavas, who are poor kisans and sharecroppers, are also Naxalites". How does he know ? "We live in the village. We watch each of them all the 24 hours."

In the Dusadh tola, a 90-year-old woman Sakli is starving. "I am alone in this world," said Sakli, who did not have any child. She was left to beg in old age when her husband, a landless peasant, died a decade ago. To get food for the year, she used to go to the landlords at the time of weighing of their harvest, to take small donations. Nobody grudged donating a few seers to the invalid Dusadhin. She could appeal for pity even in lean months. But ever since the Dusadh tola was branded a 'Naxalite hide out", Sakli was denied all sympathy. "The Babu Saheb pushed me away. Go, now Rameshwar will give you food, they said." Sakli now collects alms from other villages.

On May 24, 1976, the police camp in the village was informed of the presence of Rameshwar Dusadh in his hovel in the Dusadh tola. A group of armed landlords accompanied the policemen there. "They came in the morning while he was still sleeping and dragged him away", says Rampiari, the young wife of Rameshwar. His mother, Sundari, starts weeping. "They arrested my younger son also. When we, the women, resisted and implored, the Babu Sahebs kicked and slapped us". Another old woman in the Dusadh tola, Ramjautia, has both her sons in jail as "Naxalites". "I don't know where they are". Ramjautia is blind and a widow.

The information that the absconding Rameshwar was present in his hovel was supplied to the police by the village dafadar who was the nephew of the chowkidar murdered at Semraon railway station. On the day Rameshwar was arrested, some people attacked the dafadar in the evening and with a sickle, injured him in the thigh. "Do we need any more proof ?" This is the mukhiya's poser, "They are dangerous people. Do you think it was easy to catch Rameshwar at his home ? He rushed out with a *gadasa* and attempted to cut the hands of a policeman. Had the policemen been unwary he would have shocked them and run away."

There is no man in the Dusadh tola, only women and children. "They are too scared to stay here in daytime. They return at nightfall and leave before dawn", says Rampiari,

"who knows who will be caught as a 'Naslite' (Naxalite) ?" It is almost impossible for the Dusadhs to get any work in the nearby village—no job for Naxalites. Their women and children are starving. After the arrest of Rameshwar and his brother, there is nobody to earn bread for mother Sundari, wife Rampiari and the two children. Occasionally the Harijans of other villages help them with foodgrains. Before, Rampiari could get something from the Babu Sahebs by working as a coolie, but it is no longer possible as the wife of a 'Naslite'. The whole family is subsisting on *mahua* which Rampiari and her little children rush to collect every morning in a nearby village.

February 25, 1978

Letter

DURGA BASKI

Durga Baski, a political prisoner serving life term, died in Berhampore Special jail on March 27 for lack of proper treatment of meningitis. The Government is squarely responsible for his death. Due to utter negligence of the Cabinet, the file recommending his release dated August 29, 1977, could not be sent to the Governor for orders till the day of his death. The jail authority sent him to an outside hospital the day he died.

This particular jail, founded by the previous government to torture political opponents, particularly the Marxist-Leninists is still existing.

The Government should order a judicial enquiry into the death of Mr Baski and immediate suspension of the superintendent, the jailor and the jail doctor concerned. Pending their release the prisoners should be transferred to their respective district jails. We demand immediate closure of this jail, a symbol of medieval barbarism.

SANKAR BHATTACHARJEE
Joint Secretary,
Legal Aid Committee, Calcutta

April 22, 1978

APPENDIX

1

A NAXALITE WHO DIED

A young Naxalite was killed, along with two others, at Keshpur, Midnapur district, in June 1970, while trying to escape after killing a jotedar. According to newspaper reports, they were shot at and then beaten to death by the jotedar's men.

The following is a translation of the father's recollections about the son and a letter from him after he left his home. 'Ma', 'Bouma', 'Kakima' and 'Didi' was how he used to call his grandmother, mother, aunt and elder sister, respectively.

Let no other father face the terrible task of having to recall the memories of a son after his death. Since I have to describe this tragedy, a short family background, I feel, is necessary.

Our ancestral home was in Tangra village, Faridpur district, East Bengal. I moved to Calcutta in the middle of 1945, in search of livelihood and put up with my maternal uncle. My father was dead. The family consisted of my mother, my wife (I had just married), my younger brother and myself. My brother was already working at Calcutta Port. I found a job there.

My eldest daughter was born at this time. Another child, a son, was born but died soon. A few days after his death came Sudeb, on December 20, 1949.

From his childhood, Sudeb impressed everyone with his bright appearance and joyous nature. He was not much of a naughty child. He would not tell a lie. He was not shy or

timid. Everywhere he was uninhibited and open-hearted in his ways and behaviour.

He did not go to a *pathsala* (primary school). After studying at home he went to the Shri Ramakrishna Vidyasram (Dankuni), a high school. From there he took admission to class nine at Garalgacha Higher Secondary School. From this school he passed the Higher Secondary Examination (Arts) in the second division. Needless to say, his performance belied our expectations. Political activities under the influence of a particular ideology hampered his studies. This trend began when he was in class eight and gradually grew stronger. He was admitted to the Calcutta Sanskrit College with honours in History.

His active participation in politics continued to hamper his studies. We tried in various ways to make him concentrate on his studies, but to no avail. The higher the demands of his studies the greater seemed his neglect of them, the more his involvement in politics. We did not know what to do. We were helpless. Not to speak of his giving up the path, all our attempts to divert him from it, for even a little while, failed. I promised to give him liberty to do whatever he wanted after he did his M. A., but he rejected this proposal as pointless. In his opinion, the hour of revolution had already arrived, and to stand by at that moment was sheer stupidity. As a result, at the Part II examinations he answered two papers and then gave up. After this, he did not stay at home much longer. In May, 1969, he left us and went to distant countryside to work for his party among the peasants, the final outcome of which was cruel death on his way back after killing a jotedar.

He was alive for 13 months after he had left home. At the beginning he wrote once or twice to my mother. From the postal marks we could guess that he had been sent by his party to the Gopiballavpur area of Midnapore district to work among the peasants. The main task was to politicise them, in particular, to arouse or incite them against the age-long oppression of the local jotedars. No doubt, initially he faced many

difficulties, working in an unknown region and living in unaccustomed conditions. Things became different later. He showed up at home about three times—that too, briefly—he did not consider home safe enough. Whenever I saw him, I spoke of the dangers of the path he had chosen and asked him to give it up. This he never liked. On the contrary, it irritated him. The result was, he never had a chance to tell me anything about his dangerous course and I was too annoyed with him to ask him.

I shall now say something about his character. He wanted to check everything in the light of his own experience in a completely independent manner. He did not consign to oblivion, like a hardboiled materialist, ancient Indian beliefs, customs and ideals without examining them. For this reason, at a particular phase in the short span of his life, the influence of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda was very active and I think he was not altogether able to rid himself of this influence even towards the end.

Among others who influenced him were Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Kazi Nazrul Islam and Sukanta Bhattacharya, the poet. Sukanta was my cousin. Sukanta died of tuberculosis two years before Sudeb was born. I saw Sudeb read the biography of Manabendranath Roy and books explaining his ideas. I had no curiosity about the foreign leaders who influenced him ; about this others know better.

Sudeb had another trait in his character—a stern and unalterable dedication to ideals. By the ultimate price he paid he has proved this beyond argument. For a little over three years in the short span of his existence of 20 years, 6 months 10 days, he worked very hard to translate into reality the ideals of his party. Before he went to Midnapore, he propagated his ideas among the inhabitants of 5-7 villages near Dankuni, by lectures etc. He acquired excellent skill in delivering passionate but logical speeches. On many occasions he was able to bring his opponents to his own point of view within a short time. In debates also, on quite a few occasions, he was able to prove

his supremacy. For all these things and because he was a dedicated worker he gained much affection and esteem not only in his own party, but also among the illiterate, hungry, innocent and oppressed peasants, his last field of operations.

Not affection and esteem alone, he was able to win their hearts and minds with his love. Here lay the ultimate fulfilment of his short life. He mixed with the peasants, identified himself with their joys and sorrows, lived like them in every way, and became one of them. There he formed new relationships—mother, sister and brother—and was, to a large extent, able to recreate the environment of the home he had left. They regarded Sudeb as one of their own. Within a year he was as if born again, as a peasant.

It seems he went towards his death with full knowledge, awareness and declaration. It had been explained to him how terrible was the work to which he had dedicated himself. He himself knew that too well. After such knowledge he welcomed danger and, at least in his opinion, found self-realisation. He pursued this task of fulfilment at such a pace in the last three years of his life that he abandoned all material comfort and even all thought. From his behaviour it seemed he did not have to make any particular effort in this matter. As if his disinterested, detached way was all natural. He gave up his home for his revolutionary effort to remove the suffering of the oppressed. Revolution was his singular concern. He had no time to spare, not even a moment, for anything other than this preoccupation. This single-minded dedication is what makes the seeker achieve the long-sought success in any field.

We are worldly, selfish creatures. As such, there can be no end to the sorrows of a father who has lost his son. I was given a blessed thing but could not save it. I do not think I shall ever be able to overcome this sorrow, this repentance. Perhaps he was not meant to belong to a home and so he has left his home forever. God alone knows how I shall put up with this terrible loss in the afternoon of my unworthy life.

SUDEB'S LETTER

Ma, Bouma, Kakima, Didi,

I am alright. Don't worry about me. It is no use worrying. One way not to worry is not to think of me alone but to think of our people : to think of those poor people who have taken up arms to demand the right to live as men, of those brave young men who have identified themselves, to their utmost, with them and are advancing on the road of struggle. If you think of me as one of them, you will find that all problems are resolved.

The fight has started. Throughout the world the battle has started, initiating the end of the dark age. In every country, the sleeping, exploited masses are waking up. Asia is waking up, and Africa and Latin America. All those black and timid people who have toiled and toiled and never been recognised as human beings are now announcing their pledge to build a new world, raising their firm, clenched fists. The hungry masses of this land are fighting. Srikakulam is fighting. Gopiballavpur-Baharagada is fighting. The single spark of Naxalbari has lighted a prairie fire in the whole of Bharatbarsha. In that fire will be burnt to death the rich, all those who built their palaces on loot, on the blood of the poor. The wheel is turning. It will turn more. The world is changing. It will change further. I am one among those who are fighting to change the world. That is what is to be proud of. I live today, you may hope that I might survive in the days to come.

Letter-writing is a very troublesome job. Don't feel sad and don't get angry. I hope you are keeping well.

Yours

August 15, 1970 SUDEB

"SPECIAL" TREATMENT

On November 15, I met Ajitha for the first time after a break of nearly one year. She was at the Cannanore Jail but the Superintendent there concocted charges against her and transferred her to the Trivandrum Central Prison.

I had an interview with her for half an hour in presence of the Jailor, surrounded by most of the jail staff. She is in high spirits in spite of the enhanced life sentence given by the High Court. But her living condition is gruelling. She is completely isolated from the other jail inmates numbering 25 and odd. Moreover, she is under strict watch, so much so that even if she goes for washing or to the toilet, she is followed. She is not given any physical work. Mainly, she spends her time reading. But books—by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tsetung (the uninflammable ones) and journals are delayed. Her morning food comprises steam-boiled wheat balls, very hard to digest even for a healthy person in a normal condition, not to speak of one who cannot have any physical exercise. Her face was swollen due to *pittam* (bile) and I could presume that her health must have been shattered. I believe that comrades at the Cannanore Central Jail must be experiencing the same cruel life.

Why such treatment ? In its own interest, this reactionary and counter-revolutionary government has adopted the ambivalent policy of sometimes considering them as political prisoners and sometimes as criminals. From this, one can conclude that the powers-that-be are mortally afraid of the new force which is getting deep-rooted among the people. They may be able to crush our comrades but they can never crush Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought which is the guide to action for the new force rising on the horizon of our country.

I am writing this to keep you informed of the "special" treatment given to Ajitha, one of the best proletarian daughters

of Kerala as well as Gujarat. I am writing this not only as the mother of Ajitha but as her proletarian mother.

MANDAKINI NARAYANAN
Calicut, Kerala

December 8, 1973

IN FETTERS

Gopal Majumder, editor of the weekly *Deshabrati*, who was arrested in April 1970, is now facing trial in the court of the Additional Chief Presidency Magistrate, Calcutta, on a charge of sedition against the State. He has not engaged any lawyer for his defence.

It has been observed that Majumder is being produced before the Magistrare with bar fetters and hand-cuffs on every occasion. Some advocates, suo moto pointed out this gross violation of the law to the Magistrate but it appears that he has not bothered to take any action in this regard so far.

On 13. 2. 1974, when Majumder was again produced before the same Magistrate by the Calcutta police with fetters on, an advocate, who happened to be present at the time, pointed this out to the Magistrate and requested the Court to adjourn the proceedings of the case against Majumder and draw up a proceeding against the police officer responsible for producing Majumder in that state, as it amounted to contempt of court.

No action appears to have been taken by the Magistrate so far. This is how political prisoners are being treated even in a court of law in "the world's largest democracy".

R. S. G.
Calcutta

February 23, 1974

BEHIND BARS : HOW LONG ?

HARI P. SHARMA

On August 15, on the 27th anniversary of India's independence, about 300 academicians and intellectuals from many parts of the world joined to express their deep concern and protest over the way the Government of India has been suppressing political dissent in the country and depriving a large number of people of their basic human, political, and legal rights.

Among the signatories are :

Simone de Beauvoir
Lasse & Lisa Berg
Dr. C. Bettelheim
Dr. Malcolm Caldwell
Dr. Paresh Chattopadhyay
Dr. Noam Chomsky
Dr. Jonathan Fast
Dr. Tudor Hart
Felix Greene
Elliot Kanter
Dr. Harry Magdoff
Dr. Gail Omvedt
Dr. Joan Robinson
Dr. Mark Seldon
Dr. Amartya Sen
Dr. Paul Sweezy
Dr. Thomas E. Weisskopf

August 31, 1974

LETTER TO A FORMER CELL-MATE

MARY TYLER

My dearest Sati,

Through the walls and the miles that separate us I can hear you saying, "In Sawan it will be two years since Comrade left us." The other women will nod. It is you who have taught them the meaning of Comrade. And though we are separated, though they have taken from us the closeness born of constant contact in adversity, it is comradeship which keeps you thinking of me, and me of you.

How is your health ? Do you still get fevers from the beating, aching from the torture scars, dizziness from the damage their blows did to your ears ? I can see you picking the stones and husks and straw out of their filthy rice before you force yourself to eat a few mouthfuls, pushing aside the blackish dal and rotten curry. I hear you talking about your old mother, the father who died without your seeing him, your brothers, your own daughter, last seen years ago. Do you ever get news of your dear ones, living so near, hardly twenty miles away and yet too poor to pay the fare (and the bribe) to visit you—and too afraid ? Do you still think about the future, about the dangers of returning to your village, about the landlord's men waiting to get their revenge for the trouble you caused them by urging the poor to stand up to them ? Do you manage to get word of your husband, confined within the same walls as yourself, yet out of sight and reach ?

What is today's crisis ? Which child is sick and getting no medicine ? Which of the old women is wheezing ? Which of the young ones suffering from open wounds and sores which the 'doctor' dismisses as something quite natural for the poor to suffer from ? Is today's battle for soap, for sufficient food,

for clothing to cover the bodies of those the government is keeping naked ? Are you still managing to bear the nightmare nights, locked, so many of you, in your cage of heat, noise, disease and stench, unable to move, to twist or turn without disturbing your equally uncomfortable neighbours ? Is your throat dry, your burning body stinking because there is a water shortage, or has it rained and left the leaking roof to swamp your cell, blankets, clothes, everything ? Are you still longing for a few quiet minutes to call your own ?

And what of your 'case' ? Are they still making empty promises to submit your chargesheet ? One day threatening you with a life sentence, the next day telling you that you are bound to be acquitted ? And all of it empty words, and you still locked in the little courtyard, with the steaming bodies, the shouts, the blows from the men's sector across the wall, the flies, the dirt, the mosquitoes, the scabies that drive you slowly mad ? Whilst they drink Coca-Cola, socialize, make light of it all, and promise that your case is about to come up and your trial is due to start, as it has been about to for several years past ?

How about the jail 'babus' ? Are they still making you work for them, grinding chillies till your eyes sting, turning the grindstone till every bone in your body aches, squatting in the burning sun over the fire, roasting their chick-peas (or, I should say, your chick-peas, for they are stolen from the prisoners) and making their "chhatu" ? Are they still forcing you to 'sell' your soap ration at a quarter of market prices and pretending they are doing it as a favour to you ? Do they still strut before you telling you how lazy, criminal and dirty you all are ? Turning a deaf ear to your complaints and pleas, as if you are inventing everything ? Telling, you should count yourselves lucky that their government is giving you food and shelter, contemptuous of you as of flies on the wall ?

Yes, my dear Sati, I am sure that you have heard the cries of beaten comrades from across the wall many more times since I left, that many more corpses have passed in front of the

gate, that you have shed tears for your fellow prisoners. I know that your health is deteriorating, that your blood pressure is dangerously low, that you become more anaemic and weaker physically with each passing day.

But I am also sure that hope is alive in you still. You have hope because you trust the poor and suffering, and because you have tried to serve them. You taught me much about the hardships of life, your life and lives of millions of others. And you taught me that to end the cruelty, one has to suffer infinite injustice and cruelty. And ignoring heat and cold, sickness and suffering, one has to march onward, in every situation.

Sometimes you get a breath of outside air. You hear of elections, of people's anger, of great change in the country. But, rightly you don't dare to hope too much, because you have known disappointment so many times before. Still, you hear the rumours and your pulse quickens. They are going to release the prisoners. They are going to release you. Then weeks pass and nothing happens. They are 'talking', and you are waiting, suffering, hoping, fading. Their 'change' has changed little for you—your jailers are the same, the police who roughly shove you into the 'court gari' are the same, everything is the same. But, no, something is different. People are not the same—there are demonstrations, you hear of processions, petitions, letters, meetings, negotiations. A growing cry throughout the land, a cry for you and for thousands of others, a cry for freedom. And you know that you are not forgotten, and that the people, the people who hate tyranny, hate lies and hypocrisy, are getting impatient—and that you will be free. You will be free.

May 21, 1977
London

June 25—July 2, 1977

2

Documents from other sources
not published in Frontier

COMMUNIQUE OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST-LENINIST)

May 24, 1970

The Eighth Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)—the First Party Congress after Naxalbari, after the Party was rebuilt on Mao Tsetung Thought—was held about the middle of May, 1970. The Party Congress was successfully held in underground conditions, conditions of utmost secrecy, and was attended by comrade-delegates from various States of India, who had been elected by their respective State Conferences.

The Congress unanimously adopted the Party Programme, the Party Constitution and the Political-Organizational Report and elected the Central Committee.

The Congress was convened at immense risk when the reactionary ruling classes, threatened by the surging revolutionary struggle, had intensified their attack on the Party. The Congress aimed at developing and strengthening the unity that already existed among the revolutionary ranks. The Congress was truly a Congress of unity and became the pledge of the victory of the Indian revolution.

[Reproduced from 'MASS LINE', (a journal of the Communist Party of Canada, Marxist-Leninist) Vol 2, No. 36, September 13, 1970.]

AVENGE THE DEATH OF THE GREAT MARTYRS

Following is the text of the resolution adopted at the Party Congress [of the CPI (ML)] paying homage to the great martyrs who have fallen fighting for the cause of the Indian revolution.

Like all revolutions in history, our revolution too calls for martyrs' blood and martyrs' blood purifies class ranks and creates the new man ready to die for revolution. During those great Naxalbari days, Comrades Sovan Ali, Tribeni Kanu and Babulal showed the way and afterwards, Comrades Reddi Appalaswami Naidu, Renjim and others laid down their lives fighting heroically for the cause of revolution. Immediately after the formation of our Party on the blood of these comrades, one of our Party's founders, Comrade Panchadri Krishnamurthy, and six other Andhra comrades died martyrs' death and Comrade Krishnamurthy's declaration before the firing squad—"You cannot stop revolution by killing us"—reverberated throughout the country and proved that our Party of revolution is a Party of new men worthy of the Mao Tse-tung era. During this brief span of one year since our Party was founded, Comrades Bhaskar Rao, Ganapati, Subbarao Panigrahi, Nirmala Krishnamurthy, Ramesh Sahu, Daya Singh, Hari Singh, Ganeshan, Churchill, Kariappan, Sanatan Mondal, Subrata Choudhuri, Gour Das and many others, including a number of valiant Girijan peasants of Andhra, who fought and led armed peasant struggle, preferred to die rather than to dishonour the Party, and thus set a very high standard for belonging to our Party. But death could not silence our martyrs ; departing from us they constantly keep on reminding us of Chairman Mao's great words :

"Thousands and thousands of martyrs have heroically laid down their lives for the people ; let us hold their banner high and march ahead along the path crimson with their blood."

But should we, revolutionaries, weep over our martyrs' graves ? No, that will be an insult to their sacred memory, that will be an offence to revolution. The only way we can honour their sacred memory is by avenging the death of every one of our martyred comrades, by intensifying the armed class struggles in which they fell fighting, by intensifying the great war of annihilation of class enemies now being waged by our Party all over the country. We must turn our great grief into burning class-hatred and avenge the death of our comrades.

This Congress, therefore, while paying revolutionary homage to our great martyrs, pledges that our martyrs' blood shall not flow in vain, that every murder of our comrades and class-brothers shall be avenged, that the war of annihilation of the class-enemies shall be carried on with ever greater determination. Let not the enemy pass.

Avenge the death of our martyrs !
Carry on the battle of annihilation with ever greater determination !
Long live our martyred comrades !
Long live CPI(ML)
Long live Chairman Mao ! A long, long life to Chairman Mao !

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